Prologue

Tokyo, Shibuya.

Standing by the office window, I stopped moving the rag in my hand.

The trees lining the road outside the window are Sakura trees. White flowers have started to bloom like stars in the sky.

“It's so fast~” I couldn’t help mumbling to myself.

Behind me, someone spoke, “What’s fast?”

It was my colleague. A dignified picture in a white blouse and white Chinese-styled wool sweater, that girl rolled up her sleeves, took a mop and mopped the floor.

“It’s been a year. It’s almost been a year since I’ve started working here.”

“Oh~”

The female who said that with a sigh is named Takahashi Yuuko, Taka in short. She recently became a senior in a certain metropolitan girl’s high school.

In contrast, I am Taniyama Mai. With everyone’s help I’ve become a second year in a certain metropolitan private high school this spring.

And this is the office of “Shibuya Psychic Research” - A place where ghosts and the supernatural and other unimaginable occurrences are investigated.

“You really lasted a year – in a strange part time job like this.”

If we’re talking about the scope of my work, it's commonplace to meet ghosts. For someone like me, who had never encountered a spirit before, this is a clear improvement. How should I put it, I’m no longer scared by strange stories and what not. Even when I see horror movies, the ghosts there aren’t even real, and I can even talk about a lot of other various things.

“And the higher-ups haven't changed either. Yeah, I’m really an incredible person. It’s almost a waste of my talents!”

The boss is Shibuya Kazuya. He’s only 17 years old. He’s a man who has managed a high-class office in a high-class building in a high-class street. Although we’re talking about paranormal events, it's still science and technology that is applied in studying spirits or the supernatural, *etc.* He's terribly secretive, and his personality sucks, but what pisses me off the most is he's capable and good-looking. He’s a narcissist whom even Buddha would run barefooted from. People call him “The Secretive Naru-chan”.

Taka laughed mischievously.

“Because the boss is like this so it’ll continue, right?”

… Ah.

“That’s true, it’s already been a year. Has there been a little progress within this year?”

“What?”

“Personal relations.”

“Taka-san, we’ve agreed not to mention this, haven’t we.”

“Is that so? I think my memory has been getting poorer.”

“Hm. Did you get dementia already?”

“Don’t say it like that.”

“But I have to.”

On my reply, Taka replaced the mop and placed her hands on her hips with a tough attitude.

“Taking the words of your elder lightly would cause you to get into trouble,” she announced.

Then she ran to my side and leaned out of the window that was open for cleaning.

“Mai likes Naru!!~”

I can’t believe she actually screamed down at the street below. There were a few passers-by who looked up in curiosity.

“Hey! Look what you’ve done!”

“Ha ha, do you respect me yet?”

“I respect you. No, this subject is no match for the upcoming King.” (tl/n: 殿下 is probably used to address male monarchy, hence the next line.) “How rude to call a lady that. You should address me as ‘Queen-sama’.”

“The Queen-sama holding the mop, right?”

“How matching~”

Saying “Ah Ha”, I had no choice but to admit defeat.

“Then how is it? Is there progress?”

“The same.”

A year ago, Naru and I were merely strangers; now the relationship is one of the user and the used. At work I only did jobs like making tea. Last month, with everyone’s help I’ve gotten the title of ‘investigator’, and an increase in salary.

“Only that.” I said resolutely. Taka grasped her head in worry.

“So what've you done this year?”

“My part time job.”

Taka cooed and clenched her fist.

“You have… no will power!”

“But labor is very sacred. You have to separate work and life.”

“Ah, such admirable attention for work. If you keep thinking like that, he’ll be snatched up by someone else.”

… Ah.

“What’s unbelievable is that boss is still single.”

“There’s no mystery to that. Naru's personality is terrible.”

“Saying this type of thing with such confidence, don’t you feel a little sad?”

Yeah yeah yeah… whatever.

Anyway I really wish this supposed progress would occur. But even if I had hopes for that young gentleman, I deeply believe it would be a waste of energy. Because at age 17 he is already a workaholic, *i.e.* the demon of work. He would definitely choose the vicious spirit of a grandmother over extremely pretty girls with beautiful personalities.

Furthermore, could I, who doesn't even know his home address or telephone number, hope for any progress in the situation?

As I said that, Taka looked at me with a deeply sympathetic expression.

"Indeed it is like that. It would be much better if he told us his address and stuff at least. At the very least let us know which direction it is in."

"Yeah."

I've asked Naru that before. "In case of an emergency, could you tell me how to contact your home." Was what I said to him.

However Naru answered me like this: "If there's anything I will contact you."

Who~ ever~ said it was about you having a situation and contacting me? 'If something urgent happens to me what should I do', didn't I put it like that?

'Right, I shall tolerate that before I ask something like that', I thought. And then I thought of saying something like "But, you home is over in 三鷹, right? I've met you before at the station." Perhaps he might answer, "You must have been mistaken, I live in the XX area," or something – I hope.

But, but, as expected, Naru isn't the type who'd answer a leading question.

He coolly said a line "Are your eyes bad?"

"Do you think there could be anyone who looks like me in existence?"

'In an~y case your looks are out of the ordinary but not in a good way.' That I would get angry is also an expected result.

"It is the end for people once they give up."

Taka caressed my head.

"Yeah, I won't admit defeat."

When I was play-acting at crying, somebody opened the office door.

It was a woman of about 25 or 26 years of age who entered the office.

“Yes?”

I frantically put down the rag and attended her. She smiled – I feel that she is a person who loves to smile.

“I would like to see the boss.”

“But he is currently in the midst of traveling…”

Naru was currently away at the northern mainland (tl/n: I guess this refers to the Hokkaido region?). Although he was ‘away’, it was not work related. It should be called a simple pleasure visit.

“Then, is Lin around?”

The Lin she referred to should be Lin-san.

The person called Lin-san is Naru’s helper. Nobody knows his real name and age – in this way he is more mysterious than Naru.

“Yes. Then, excuse me.”

Before I finished, that person was still smiling broadly.

“My name is Mori, Mori Madoka (森, 森圆). If you tell Lin that he will understand.”

This really shocked me. Could this person possibly be one whom Lin-san is familiar with?

In the end I asked her to take a seat on the sofa first, and then went to the Resource Room to call Lin-san.

The Resource Room located next to the boss’s office is a narrow sound proofed room lined with video recorders and monitors. Although I don’t know what he does, Lin-san spends most of his time in the office there. Although he is frequently re-watching videos of completed cases while working on the computer, today he was teaching a psychic girl to bend ladles.

I gently knocked on the door and opened it, Lin-san and the psychic girl raised their heads.

The psychic girl's name is Kasai Chiaki. This spring, she has smoothly ascended a grade in a certain metropolitan girls' school's junior college. Facing the ladle on a table in the corner of the room, Chiaki-sempai smiled at me.

In contrast, Lin-san was completely expressionless.

"Lin-san?"

Even though I spoke to him, Lin-san did not reply nor did he smile.

"That is, we have a guest. A guest called Mori-san."

An expression of mild shock crossed Lin-san's face.

"Her name is Mori Madoka-san."

Lin-san stood up abruptly. His expressionless face clearly showed signs of shock. Ignoring me who stood at the door, Lin-san walked into the office.

Mori-san sat hunched on the sofa.

"Madoka."

When she was called by Lin-san, a brilliant smile appeared on Mori-san's face.

"Lin."

Mori-san stood up joyously.

Could… could this person possibly be Lin-san's…?

"Do excuse me for coming without warning. How have you been?"

"Yeah. Please take a seat. What's up, all of a sudden?"

She smiled a carefree smile.

"Yeah, I thought I'd try to shock you guys ~ are you shocked?"

"I was shocked. You didn't come just for that reason, did you?"

Eh eh eh. This is scary. There is a smile on Lin-san's face.

"I suppose so. Is Naru not around?"

"He's gone travelling."

Lin-san replied softly. A bitter smile appeared on Mori-san's face.

“… if that’s the case. Then.”

Mori-san announced resolutely:

“Call him back for me. There is work.”

This was a really abnormal development.

“… Who is that?”

Chiaki-sempai asked softly.

“… don’t know. I even thought she is Lin-san’s lover.”

Taka chattered.

“And don’t you think her tone is a bit like one of giving orders?”

I said under my breath.

We gathered in the kitchen, talking quietly while we made tea.

“Isn’t her attitude towards Lin-san very tough?”

“Exactly.”

“It looks like she has at least a deep friendship with him.”

Talking like that we could not reach any conclusion. But within the me who was brewing the tea, was a curiosity that could not be satisfied.

I placed the tea on the table. Mori-san smiled and nodded to me in greeting. I returned the nod in greeting. Lin-san was making a call. Wearing a difficult expression, he sighed gently, then handed the receiver to Mori-san.

“Please. It is Naru.”

Naru is a person who means ‘no’ when he says ‘no’. I was afraid, on the other end of the line, he’d say something like “don’t joke with me.” However, Mori-san’s smile did not crack.

“You will come back, right?”

Saying that, she smiled. After a moment of silence, Mori-san continued in an excited voice.

“Thank you *heart*”

Like that.

“He wants to come back?”

I couldn’t help asking. Mori-san nodded.

“Yeah. He said he’ll arrive tonight.”

What ~~. Inconceivable.

Naru’s travels last at least a week. The long ones can take over 10 days. Now he will actually come back in 2 days? Do you move just because of a call like that, Naru, Hn?

Waiting for us beyond this unexpected incident was a situation beyond our imagination.

Lin-san wore a perplexed expression and returned to the Resource Room. I poured another cup of tea for Mori-san.

“You’re really incredible.”

I said. A blank look filled Mori-san’s face.

“Incredible? Why?”

“Because it only took you 2 sentences to convince Naru.”

Mori-san gurgled with laughter.

“… so it is like that. – are you from this place?”

“Yes. I am a part timer. I am called Taniyama.”

“Hn~ For me, I think you are the one who is really incredible.”

Ai?

“Whether it is Naru or Lin they are both hard to get along with. They are very shy. That those 2 have employed someone is something I find shocking already, and it also looks like you are very used to them, right?”

Ha~ This, could be considered such. Thanks to them I’ve recently became noticeably more sharp tongued.

I smiled a little embarrassedly, then looked at Mori-san.

“That… what relationship do you all have? Could I ask?”

“To put it simply, I am the master.”

“Master?”

“That’s right. I’m the one who thought Naru to ghost-hunt.”

What in the world.

But, there is that too. Naru couldn’t possibly be independent without having learned it from someone.

“Then, is Mori-san also a ghost hunter?”

“Previously I was; I initially was about to pass the baton over to Naru.”

“You don’t do it anymore?”

“Yes. For me, I am lacking a certain ability to adapt.”

“Ah?”

“I’m no good with machines. I spoil them very quickly.”

Child-like, Mori-san smacked both her cheeks.

“Ah…”

“I clearly follow what Naru and Lin-san say to do. I can only think that I am being disliked!”

That… that really makes one hurt. That is people who don’t get along with machines. That is not a trait suited to being a ghost hunter.

But Mori-san looks like a very nice person to be with. Could it be, I can ask this person? Where does Naru live? What is Lin-san’s real name? What is his age? What was Naru like in school? Who are the members of his family? What is Lin-san’s biography? How lucky, I thought. Just when I was about to fire questions at Mori-san, Lin-san walked out of the Resource Room wearing a thin overcoat.

“Madoka, anyway we are going out first. – Taniyama-san.”

“Ye… yes.”

“I’m going to leave now. Please help me tell Kasai-san that.”

“Yes… thank you for your hard work today.”

Ah ah, I was preempted by Lin-san.

Just like that I was left with my questions; that lady left the office, leaving behind Taka, Chiaki-sempai and I, who were filled with regrets.

Chapter 1: That Mansion

1

On the second day, I rushed to the office after the term opening ceremony. It was already filled with people.

“What is going on?”

Taka shrugged in response to me, who had entered the office and couldn’t help peering around.

“I don’t know.”

“Has Naru returned?”

“It looks like it. When I got here he was discussing something in his office, but I haven’t seen him yet.”

“Then, why did he gather everyone here?”

“Please don’t ask me.”

On the sofa used for guests sat 4 people who were not guests. And they were, Bou-san, Ayako, Masako and John. Although they are not members of “Shibuya Psychic Research”, they are psychics who act in adjunct with us.

I gently lowered my head.

“Yo.”

It was Bou-san who raised his hand in his usual leisurely manner. Takigawa Housou. A monk originally of Takano Mountain.

“What is going on?”

“Don’t ask me. I was called here by Naru-chan.”

“Really?”

“Ah. I cancelled all my prior engagements before coming.”

“What’s up, again?”

“On the phone last night he said there’s a big job. He hung up after saying there’s a job; I came at the designated time, but he himself is waiting in his office instead.”

“In that case I completely don’t understand what is going on.”

“It is exactly like that.”

I poked John, who was sitting right in front of me, in the shoulder. John Brown - an exorcist whose attractions are his doll face and Kansai accent.

“What about you, John? Have you heard nothing about it?”

John’s soft blond hair shook side to side.

“It’s the same on my side; he didn’t tell me anything either.”

“But he actually gathered everyone here - what type of situation could it be?”

The one who cut in was Ayako. One had better not be tricked by her fancy make-up and mistake her for a bar hostess. Matsuzaki Ayako. Self proclaimed Miko.

As I was thinking along with Bou-san, John and Ayako, Masako started laughing softly. Hara Masako - a 16 year old top grade spirit medium.

“What is it?”

Ayako used her sharp voice to ask in response. Masako used the cherry-blossom colored sleeve of her kimono to hide her mouth.

“… then, that is saying there was no adult contacting everyone.”

“Contact? What about?”

“Contact from the client in this situation. And when so many psychic users are clearly gathered.”

“And this so-called ‘client’ is?”

“For me it was a person called Ohashi (大桥) who contacted me.”

Saying that, a mocking smile appeared on that doll-like face.

That was saying, this Ohashi-san had nothing to call us for – I think that was what Masako was trying to say.

Ayako’s face was filled with fury. Just as she was about to speak with displeasure, the door to the boss’s office opened, and the verbal war did not have the chance to start.

It was Naru, dressed entirely in black, who pushed the door open and walked out.

Aiyaya, he really did come back.

Following him was Lin-san’s tall form and Mori-san’s gentle figure. Then, “… eh?”

John and Ayako said simultaneously,

“Young man?!”

Bou-san stood up.

“Yasuhara-kun!”

I shouted.

The fourth person who came out from the boss’s office, was Ex-Student Council President Yasuhara, who had fortunately entered a certain first class public university this spring.

Regarding us, who stood there with our jaws hanging open, Naru looked like he found us noisy; he waved his hands and called for everyone to sit on the sofa. Following Naru’s instructions, we sat, and everyone asked the question that I wanted to ask. Naru, looking impatient, waved his hands once more.

“We will explain the situation in order from the beginning to everyone; could I have a bit of quiet?”

A frown had already appeared on that other-worldly beautiful face, there was no use for us to continue pestering. Out of options, everyone shut their mouths;

Naru looked around at us.

“Someone has made a request to us. I have already accepted. So I hope to receive everyone’s help.”

Masako cut in and said,

“That is… is it a request from the agent – a person called Ohashi?”

“Yes.”

“He made his request to me last week.”

Naru nodded.

“Then Hara-san must act independently.”

“Of course, ask if there’s anything I can help with.”

Doll-san said that with a coy tone, smiling. Ayako raised her brows.

Naru only nodded, then looked around at us once more.

“The investigation will begin in 5 days. Is there anyone here who cannot participate?”

No one replied to Naru’s words. After confirming that, “I hope to receive everyone’s help this time.”

Naru turned to look at Yasuhara. Yasuhara Osamu - the Student Council President who came here to make his request on behalf of the students in the previous case.

Upon seeing Yasuhara’s gentle nod, Naru dropped a bomb.

“Yasuhara-kun, I would like to ask you to act as my substitute.”

“What in the world?”

“That is to say, have Yasuhara-kun play your part?”

To Ayako’s abrupt outburst, Naru shot a cold look.

“Didn’t you hear what I just said?”

“Of course I heard it. But why?”

“I will explain the situation. Can’t you wait a little?”

Swallowing Naru's ice-cold words, Ayako fell silent. Then suddenly Mori-san cut in.

"Wh~y do you have to use that tone of voice?"

She glared at Naru, shocked. And then she looked around at us, "I'm really sorry. This child has such poor manners."

This… "This child"!

"Could everyone treat him as a person with an abnormal disposition and tolerate him please."

What type of response do you think we should have? Everyone looked on blankly, while Naru looked extremely displeased and coughed once.

"… this is an extremely big job. It could even be called a job for publicity. The client has requested secrecy in its execution, but to what extent secrecy can be maintained I don't know. If the media gets wind of this I can imagine it turning into a big uproar. I did not want to accept it initially, but some events have occurred such that I had to accept. That's why I have requested Yasuhara-kun to be my substitute."

The last job was also a famous one, besides paranormal events becoming the target of the media, we, the ones responsible for resolving the situation, have also become celebrities. News reporters and magazine reporters have arrived in droves and gave us endless trouble. For the media-hating Naru, he left this place from the second day of the incident until the clamor had subsided.

"However, is this a situation of the level that requires Naru to orchestrate?"

To Bou-san's query, Naru replied coolly,

"If that was not the case I would not purposely have Yasuhara-kun come here."

Naru gently rested his hands on his knees.

"It looks like the client has gathered many psychic users. They are practically all suspicious people widely lauded by the media. I don't want to have anything to do with that type of people."

Bou-san smiled, satisfied.

“So you are forcing something you dislike onto someone else?”

“I’m not particularly forcing you all. If you don’t feel like it, you may leave.”

When Naru said those cold words, once again Mori-san interrupted everyone’s words.

“Why don’t you ask everyone nicely? You do wish for everyone to go together, right? That’s why you have gathered everyone here, am I wrong?”

… and that’s true too.

“When you are asking people for something, do you use this tone to speak? I’ve clearly told you before – such a child that refuses to learn.”

Has there ever existed a person who was so firm with Naru?

When Mori-san lectured Naru, who had turned to a side, we started laughing.

“I’m so sorry he is such a mal-mannered child. Could everyone please not hate him.”

“Madoka!”

Aiya, Naru looks rather displeased.

“Wha~t?”

In contrast, Mori-san wore a smile that looked like heart symbols were about to come flying out.

“Could you be quiet for a while? I can’t speak at all like this.”

“Ah, Ok.”

Saying that, Mori-san flashed a smile.

“If that’s the case, you have to mind your tone *heart*.”

… very, very strong. This person is so inconceivably strong.

Naru, wearing an expression of extreme displeasure, was momentarily lost for words.

Mori-san looked around at us again.

“Naru really dislikes the publicity stage. He planned to refuse this job, but he

accepted only because of my situation. Although I think it is going to trouble everyone, could everyone please help him.”

When asked by someone like that, everyone should have trouble refusing. Everyone nodded, as though influenced by Mori-san’s smile.

Naru knocked on the table with his fingertip unhappily.

“In conclusion, I beg to be excused from the foolish uproar like the one that happened the last time. And I don’t wish to cooperate with the fools who are immeasurably self-satisfied when lauded by the foolish media.”

… Eh. Isn’t this a little out of the ordinary?

“And then? Is Naru-chan not going to the site?”

Bou-san asked. Naru frowned.

“Even if I didn’t want to go, I don’t have any reason not to.”

“I have a question.”

I raised my hand very respectfully.

“Then what character will Naru go as?”

“I will go as a simple investigator from this place.”

… Oh. If he’s an investigator then isn’t that the same rank as me?

“Then, what is the client like this time?”

Ayako asked. Using a dangerous expression, Naru gave a name. Everyone was instantaneously stumped.

This was a super famous person whose name even I knew of. That being the case, if the media finds out, there would really be a huge uproar.

Regardless, it was the name of Japan’s former prime minister.

2

Discussion and preparation took 3 days. On the fourth day we set of for the distant Nagano-ken to begin our investigation.

The subject of the investigation was said to be an ancient manor. Because there were spirits appearing it was abandoned for a long time. … Yeah, this is a clichéd story.

Before entering the city we turned off towards the mountains. We followed the road, covered by greenery and winding according to the slope and climbed upwards. Very soon we encountered an ancient, dilapidated gate: an unwelcoming iron lattice red with rust. The doorpost looked like it was made with bricks, but it appeared half rotten, covered entirely with green moss. Although there was a door, there were no walls on either side. On both sides of the door was a dense forest. It gave one a feeling of not wanting to take a single step in – a dark and frightening feeling.

When the gates were opened, our “Shibuya Psychic Research” van travelling ahead of us entered. That vehicle was driven by Lin-san, with Naru as passenger. I took Bou-san’s car. In the passenger seat was Ayako; John, Yasuhara and I were in the back.

After travelling in the dim forest for a while, we saw a majestic building.

- It was huge. Really very huge.

“… incredible…”

I raised my head to look at the building and couldn’t help muttering. Yasuhara also nodded in agreement.

“Really. It’s like a hotel or a museum.”

Indeed, this manor looked like an ancient hotel or a museum. Rather than calling it a big house, it might as well be called a castle. The gardens surrounding

the house also looked abandoned. Even from the outside, one could tell that this house had been vacant for a long time.

Ayako, too,

“Really incredible. There really is everything in this world.”

For no reason we were all moved.

“But it is very poorly maintained. Left like this it is almost like a haunted house.”

Ayako said that; Bou-san couldn’t control his laughter.

“Certainly, isn’t this a haunted house?”

“Ah, it is.”

Indeed, there isn’t a house more like a haunted house than this one – an immense abandoned manor. The haunted houses in foreign horror films are just like this one.

Counting the number of windows, the house was basically a 2 storey structure. There were 3 levels at some places. The exceedingly steep roof was a grayish green color, and attic windows could be seen. Brick colored chimneys normally protruded from the roof, but about half of them have already been destroyed.

The windows too, kept up the appearance with cracked glass. Although all the windows were fitted with frames, only about half remained in a whole condition. The wall, which repetitively protruded and receded in a complicated shape, was made with grey stone. On that wound crisscrossing ivy; due to the season, its naked stems created a tortoise shell appearance.

The gravel pathway overgrown with weeds led straight to the building. After disembarking on a patch of withered, yellowed weeds had overgrown such that it was no different from a lawn, our feet up to the calves were buried in leaves dampened by dew.

“Mai, your first impression is?”

Looking up at the house, Bou-san asked.

“It gives me goosebumps.”

For some reason, this house gave off a very strong oppressive feeling. If I weren't in a group with adult psychics, I definitely wouldn't think of entering.

"Yeah, anyway such impressive haunted houses are rare."

Even Bou-san looked a little tense.

After we disembarked and were looking vacantly at the roof, Naru's sharp voice came from where he had walked up to the main door.

"What are you lot doing?"

Bou-san couldn't help bending his head slightly down and whispering into my ear.

"With that type of attitude, do you think he can pass as just a simple investigator?"

"You're right."

It looks like the day this huge lie is seen through isn't too far off.

After ascending the stone steps was the main door. Beyond the immense pair of doors was a ridiculously humongous hall. It looked like the electricity was connected; the hanging lamps were lit and shone brightly. At the center of the hall were fairy-tale like stairs. Two men stood at the base of the stairs. One was a man above forty, and the other was about sixty.

We walked through the main doors which had always been open, one of the men walked up to us.

"I am called Ohashi."

Saying that, the man bowed deeply.

"The boss is…"

When that was said, Yasuhara took a step forward.

"That would be me."

… ah ah, I ah'ed because I'm an honest person and therefore dislike this. However, Ohashi-san did not have any suspicion, and bowed towards Yasuhara.

"I have been given full responsibility over this issue. You can take me as the

client.”

Yasuhara also bowed gently.

“I am the boss, Shibuya Kazuya.”

He said that with perfect composure, as though without any guilt on his conscience.

“So I see. You are as youthful as I’ve heard you to be.”

Saying that, Ohashi-san looked towards us.

“You all are?”

Bou-san gently lowered his head.

“I am called Takigawa.”

“Takigawa… the first name is?”

“Housou.”

Ohashi-san softly repeated “Takigawa Housou” once. Then he turned to Ayako.

“I am Matsuzaki Ayako.”

“I am called John Brown.”

Yasuhara spoke.

“They are psychics who have deigned to work closely with us. They have specially come to help us this time.”

“Is that so. And the other 3 are?”

Yasuhara lightly replied.

“They are my assistants.”

“And their names are?”

Ohashi-san asked like that; I momentarily glanced unconsciously towards Naru and Lin-san. Being asked like that was no big deal for me, but what would Naru and Lin-san do?

Naru spoke up first.

“I am called Narumi Kazuo (鳴海一夫).”

… That big liar. (tl/n: but calling him 'Naru' still works, so it works for me :P) Ohashi-san looked at me.

“Ah, … I am Taniyama Mai.”

Ohashi-san’s vision turned towards Lin-san. Even we had shifted our sights onto Lin. He was finally about to divulge his name. Or would he refuse as usual? That we were enthusiastically looking forward to it was something that couldn’t be helped. Everyone was unconsciously staring at Lin-san.

Lin-san wore an extremely blank look and lowered his head.

“I am Lin Koujo (Lin2 Xin4 Chu2 林兴除).” (tl/n: The chinese characters used, the han yu pin yin for the mandarin pronunciation are listed, but since he is from Hong Kong, and Cantonese is the main dialect spoken there the mandarin pronunciation is probably wrong, so I copied the name given in the English Manga…)(con't: In mandarin pronunciation (hanyu pingyin) 林兴除 is indeed Lin2 Xin4 Chu2. In cantonese romanization it is Lam4 Hing3 Cheui4. In Kanji romanization, 林興除 is hayashi kyou jo. 興 is an alt form of 兴 which means joy/prosper and 除 means remove/except, so 兴除 might match his description.) … ai, ai~~!?

Compared to Ohashi-san who had asked the question, the lot of us were gasping unconsciously.

“You are Chinese?”

“I have gone back to China recently.”

“Were you born in Hong Kong?”

“Yes.”

So… so Lin-san was actually a foreigner! Really, really incredible.

It’s really annoying, about that Lin-san, it wouldn’t hurt to tell us directly. … no, wait a moment. It could be that the supposed “Lin Koujo” was a temporary pseudonym like Naru’s.

Eh~~ It’s very deep…

Ohashi-san looked around at us, then gestured towards the corridor at the upper left.

“Please come this way. All the guests have already gathered.”

3

(tl/n: this part lists a large number of names and characters. I've tried to copy the names off the English manga, but the manga cut down several characters, so I'm not too sure if I've gotten all the names right. Characters whose names were copied from the manga are written in English with the Chinese characters in apprentices; other characters with names not from the manga are written with the Chinese characters, with the English pronunciation in apprentices followed by a question mark. The English pronunciation listed will be used in all future references to that character, unless no pronunciation is given.) (tl/n2: In the original text – as original as a Japanese to Chinese translation can be – Mai refers to all the other staff and minor characters as 大叔, 老婆婆, 哥哥, 姐姐 *etc.* They translate directly as 'uncle', 'granny', 'older brother' and 'older sister'. However, I found it very awkward to have Mai calling complete strangers so intimately. Hence I have replaced these honorifics with descriptions about the ages and genders of the characters. 'uncle' became 'man', 'granny' became 'old lady', 'elder brother' became 'young man' and 'older sister' became 'young woman'.) Ohashi-san led us through many turns in the wide corridor, towards the center of the house. It was a really quaint, intricately complicated building, or perhaps a mansion as it was originally called. As I am merely a plebian I don't quite understand.

The place Ohashi-san brought us to, was a frighteningly large room. In the center of the grandiose room was a large table with many people sitting at it, waiting.

… Aiyo, Masako was there too.

Masako had arrived here much earlier, and sat there dressed in her usual kimono. She looked at us from there, with a slight smile on her face.

We were apparently the last group to arrive. After Naru, who was the last, had entered, the man standing next to the door shut it.

Ohashi-san had us seated properly.

“Everyone has arrived, so I shall begin.”

Saying that, Ohashi-san,

“First, let me introduce each of our guests who have come to visit us.”

Ohashi-san initially gestured to a man seating at the extreme end.

“Mitsuhashi Houmei-sama 三橋芳名 from Sankonkai 三魂会 (Association of the Three Immortal Souls of Taoism).”

That man wore a face filled with suspicion and nodded in greeting towards everyone.

“聖忍 Hijiri Shinobu-sama of the 澄明協会(Choumei Association), with his assistants Uehara Miki-sama(上原美紀) and Atsugi Hideo-sama (厚木秀雄).”

A group of 3 consisting of a man about 30, and a young man and woman.

“Professor Igrashi Chie(五十智絵) of the National Defense Academy of Japan (防衛大学) and her assistant Suzuki Naoko (鈴木直子)-sama.

A refined old lady and a young miss.

“The Abbott of Housen Temple(法专寺), Imura Kenshou(井村健照)-sama.”

An “Abbott” is a type of monk, Bou-san had said before. Just like the mentioned bald-headed man.

“Psychic, Hara Masako-san.”

I don’t need to explain more with Masako.

“Head of Minami Psychic Research (南心灵调查会), Minami Reimei (南麗明)-sama. And the members 中原清明 Nakahara Kiyoaki-sama, Shiraishi Yukie(白石幸恵)-sama, and Fukuda Miwa(福田三輪)-sama.”

An elderly man, a younger one, a middle-aged woman and a young woman.

Ah ah! Really, who exactly is whom? Can I remember everyone’s name before the end of the job? Hee hee.

The only ones that had yet to be introduced were us, and a kind looking foreign gentleman.

“This person listening by the side is Professor Oliver Davis from the British Society for Psychic Research.”

Everyone’s vision was immediately focused.

Professor Davis.

Even I know of him – this celebrity within the industry – a researcher in the English Society of Psychical Research, aka SRP. He is a psychic gifted with both ESP (Extra Sensory Perception) and PK (Psycho Kinesis).

Everyone’s gazes were filled with mixed respect and competitiveness, but only those who were taken aback showed it clearly on their faces. (tl/n: please proofread)(pr/n:I believe there is a mistake in the chinese ver.) Ohashi-san ignored the minor chattering and continued the introductions.

“The Head of Shibuya Psychic Research, Shibuya Kazuya-san and co.”

Aiyo, Ohashi-san had turned everyone into assistants.

“Takigawa Housou-sama, John Brown-sama, Matsuzaki Ayako-sama, Narumi Kazuo-sama, Taniyama Mai-sama, and Lin Koujo-sama.”

Ohashi-san pointed us out individually, while correctly listing our names. Incredible.

“There are twenty persons listed above.”

Following that Ohashi-san introduced the 5 men who had appeared without me noticing. They were the men standing by the door just now. Saying they were there to look after us or something, ie they were the staff here.

Ohashi-san continued to speak.

“My master’s wish is that everyone lives here during the course of the investigation.”

His ‘master’ refers to Ohashi-san’s employer.

Eh~~. ‘Politicians’ should be public servants. But nobody mentioned the man in the City Hall. Why is that? Thinking about it closely, it is really strange~~.

“Of course, there is no problem if you should wish to withdraw from the investigation and leave, but prior to that could I request everyone not to enter or

leave this place.”

4

After taking care of the luggage, myself, Ayako and others went to the Dining Room. I'm not sure why, but everyone was together in the Dining Room. That is to say, twenty people, all drinking tea.

After Ayako, Masako and I sat down, a man asked if we would like tea. In this manner it was really like a hotel.

I asked for a cup of coffee. Seated at the table, Minami-san from Minami Psychic Research, was talking very proudly to the people around him.

"Please leave it to me. There won't be any trouble at all. Not only do we have advice from Professor Davis, in the worst scenario we can get help and advice from the American Alex Taunus (阿历克斯?塔乌纳斯) – everyone knows him, right?, he's a famous psychic – and Uri Geller."

Ales Taunus. Uri Geller.

Aren't they both famous psychics? I think anyone in this field would know of Taunus, and Geller is a very famous person. Famous to the extent that it makes one feel that that Minami-san is lying.

Isn't that fellow at a little great at least?

Minami-san continuously bragged about how wide his connections were. Psychics and researchers whom even I know of all appeared to be his friends.

The people around him wore expressions of half-doubt.

"He's really incredible."

I whispered to John who was seated next to me.

"Yeah. He actually knows of Professor Davis."

Yeah. However one puts it, the Professor is a person nobody in the industry wouldn't know of.

The Professor sat next to Minami-san, smiling calmly while replying to the fragments of English spoken by the people around him.

“Which county is the Professor from?”

“He is English.”

“So it is like that. How should I put it – he gives off the feeling of an English gentleman.”

“Yes indeed. However,”

John tilted his head.

“However?”

“Nothing much. However, the Professor is much older than I had imagined. … I originally thought he would be a much younger person.”

The Professor is probably around 40. I feel that he is young enough. Because the image of ‘Professors’ in my mind is that of an old man.

“Hey, can you speak English, John?”

When I asked that, John’s blue eyes were shocked wide open.

“I… *do* come from an English speaking country.”

… Yeah, I know that. It’s just that people fluent in English are a little hard to come by.

“… I’ve asked a really stupid question. Because your Japanese is not bad, John.”

“Thank you for saying that. Then, what do you want to do?”

“Could you act as interpreter in a while or something?”

After I said that, John laughed out loud.

“With the Professor?”

“Yeah. Regardless he is a famous person, and I want to speak to him.”

John smiled.

“Is he very ugly?”

“No. Just now Takigawa-san also said the same thing to me.”

What the *Is Bou-san also*?

“Even Bou-san too, can’t defeat a famous person.”

“What did Takigawa-san say to the Professor… could I ask?”

“Admiration?”

“Exactly. Takigawa-san admires the Professor greatly.”

Eh~~ that is to say he is a fan of the Professor. Putting it like that, Bou-san regularly uses anecdotes of the Professor as examples.

As we were chit chatting, Naru spoke to Yasuhara.

“Then, boss, let’s begin.”

… Eh. I felt a little unwell.

“Yes.”

Yasuhara doesn’t make others feel the slightest bit that he is the head of the “Shibuya Psychic Research”. After giving an honest reply, we, who are the muscle, stood up.

5

To begin we had to move the equipment to the room which was to act as the headquarters of the investigation. There were computers, instruments of all shapes and sizes, a huge pile of surveillance equipment, *etc.* We put together the stands then installed the equipment while connecting the computer and monitor cables. While we were engaged in those jobs, Ohashi-san appeared.

"Is the arrangement of having your rooms here alright?"

Yasuhara nodded to Ohashi-san in greeting.

"Yes. Thank you very much."

"The equipment is really impressive."

Ohashi-san looked up at the equipment on the stands with a look of awe.

"Thank you for saying so. Then, I have a question I would like to ask you, may I?"

… Eh eh. Yasuhara is doing the questioning?

"Ah, ask away."

"Then…"

With that, Yasuhara turned back to look at Naru.

"Narumi-kun, could you please."

Aiyah, so there was still this hand to play.

Yasuhara smiled pretentiously.

"I have to go to the van to check on the equipment. –Ohashi-san, excuse me. Thank you."

With that said, Yasuhara left. Naru let Ohashi-san take a seat, and then sat down himself. He opened a file at the table we had asked them to prepare.

“First, could you please confirm once more the content of the initial request.”

Eh. With Naru starting work, the atmosphere also started to stretch taut. Even the air around the ones assembling equipment tensed.

Ohashi-san began to speak very seriously.

“This building was originally the property belonging to the master’s in-laws. Not only had the mistress never lived here, even her father… that is the previous generation, had also never lived here. Furthermore there are legends about spirits appearing here, and then now these things have all been forgotten. The month before last, there was a boy who vanished in this building.”

“… this, how is it explained?”

“Because this is a vacant house, there were some young people from the nearby suburbs coming and going. That is to say the entire ‘Bōsōzoku’ (tl/n: motorcycle street gang) trespassed in here, then one of them disappeared, and they reported it to the police. Because the design of this huge building is extremely complicated, everyone thought that the youth was not feeling well at some place and couldn’t be found; the police also gathered manpower to search, but he still couldn’t be found. And this isn’t the only thing.”

Ohashi-san laughed bitterly, looking very troubled.

“Even a youth from the fire department involved in the search has disappeared.”

… wow…

“At that time there were a few who said they had seen ghosts and the type. When this place was renovated, an incident of a workman disappearing had also occurred. The previous generation had repeatedly exhorted during their lifetime that this building should not be touched.”

Ohashi-san himself looked half-believing; his face wore a bitter smile.

“However, two people have disappeared here, and bad rumors have spread, so we can’t leave it as it is. Or rather, we also don’t wish for more victims to appear… Therefore we are trying to ask you psychics to take a look.”

“So that’s the case.” Saying that Naru looked around the room. This was also a

posh and spacious room – just like the mansions that appear in foreign films. Although there are some places that have been badly degraded, it was spick and span.

“This looks like an ancient building… when was it built?”

“I’ve heard that it was initially built around the 10th year of the Meiji Era.”

“The 10th year of the Meiji is…”

“About 110 years ago. The year was 1877. However, after its construction this house was continuously added to or renovated, and it is said that there is practically nothing remaining of the original building now.”

“Do you know when the renovations took place?”

“Unfortunately… This building was built by the generation before the last – by the mistress’s grandfather. Apparently from that time he had frequently renovated the house. When the previous generation was around, he would renovate a part of the house almost every year.”

Naru stopped writing in the notebook and looked up.

“Every year? But they don’t live here right?”

“Yes, it was like that.”

… how strange. If that’s the case, what did they do the construction for?

“Could I ask what the name of the generation before last was?”

“He was called Miyama Kaneyuki (美山钲幸). He owned a large piece of land in the Suwa region. Then he built a (cotton? silk?) spinning factory, and was a philanthropist. Apparently he founded an orphanage or a private hospital or something. At first, it was said that due to the unrest in Meiji 40, that is to say 1907, the hospital etc was forced to close amongst all the other businesses that were sold off.”

… is this a Japanese History lesson?

“In the end Miyama Kaneyuki passed away about three years later.”

How tragic ~~. He must have felt very depressed then.

“Subsequently the next generation 宏幸(Hiroyuki?) inherited Kaneyuki’s work.

The previous generation also died about twenty years ago.”

Naru knocked on the table with his fingertip.

“Did Kaneyuki live here?”

“Yes. The previous generation was born in the main house in the Suwa region, and apparently never lived over here. This place was just a holiday home at first.”

“Has Hiroyuki ever been here before?”

“It appears so.”

“Have you ever seen anything here yourself, Ohashi-san?”

“I arrived here about a week ago to make preparations. However nothing like that has happened.”

“The others too?”

“Yes. I have not heard of anything happening.”

Naru looked deep in thought. He frowned slightly, “That… Could I talk to the people who were with the missing person?”

“I’m very sorry; if it is possible we would wish to proceed with the investigations in secrecy…”

Naru frowned slightly. But regarding that issue he made no further comment.

“Lastly, do you have any opinion on the cause of the rumours?”

“I really don’t know anything.”

“Thank you very much.”

Lowering his head gently, Naru spoke.

“Ah ah, Ohashi-san. Could you give me the floor plan of this building?”

“I’m really very sorry. I’ve enquired before, but it’s said that such a thing doesn’t exist at all. Just as a floor plan was about to be drawn the building was coincidentally renovated again and…”

“… is that so? Thank you.”

“This building does give one the feeling of a haunted house don’t you think?”

Once Ohashi-san had left, Ayako's excited-for-no-reason voice piped up.

Bou-san also laughed contentedly.

"Exactly. An ancient bungalow. A deep and long history. … Naru-chan, how is it?"

Naru looked reluctant.

"I feel a little unsettled."

"What about?"

"A haunted house left vacant for a long time. The building itself is very complicated and there is no floor plan. But we have to live inside."

Yeah. In such situations Naru has always advocated not staying at the site until safety can be verified.

"Aiyo, such a cowardly statement."

"Can't you call this being cautious? – Mai."

"Yes~~."

"Anyway set up thermographs around this area and observe. Go with Bou-san. Do not continue once the sun has set. After dusk you must stay together with the others. Do you understand?"

"… Yeah."

After saying that, Naru looked at Ayako.

"Can you write some protective charms?"

"Of course I can. I am a Miko after all."

… and that's true too. If there's anyone who thinks that Bou-san looks like a monk he deserves my praise.

Naru rapped the table with a bang.

"The protective charms – please make one for each person. Also make one for each room."

Bou-san tilted his head.

“Isn’t this over-reacting?”

“This is a line from a fellow lacking in thought trying to find excuses to be lazy.”

Bou-san’s face sank momentarily. Then he smiled contentedly.

“-Yeah. It is indeed better to be a little more cautious.”

He looked at Naru with a celebratory expression.

“… what?”

“That attitude, if you aren’t more careful and change your behavior normally you would be seen through, Narumi-kun the investigator.”

Ayako also clapped her hands.

"Ah, what he says is true. Oh, you are really too arrogant to be seen as an investigator~~"

Hehe.

"Oh, we were asked to helped to the best of our capabilities by the director, who is our distinguished guest. If you don't listen to us with the appropriate attitude~~"

Naru frowned slightly.

“… I understand. And your ages are truly *much greater* than mine.”

This guy. He clearly emphasized the words “much greater”.

Naru stood up. He immediately put a pretentious smile on his face.

“Then, I would like to start work. Could everyone help out? Matsuzaki-san, Takigawa-san?”

This is really chilling. Or more accurately it makes one shiver although it isn’t cold. John, looking over, also hugged his head.

“Whatever… Mai, let’s go.”

“Yes, I’m coming.”

Only Bou-san and I hurriedly escaped from that place.

Chapter 2: Blindfold

1

We went to the van to retrieve thermometers and small blackboards. Following that, together with Substitute Head Yasuhara, who was alone, the three of us went to various rooms to measure the temperature. It is said that in locations where paranormal activities take place, the temperature of that location would be lowered.

We discussed what Ohashi-san had said while we walked.

“Is it really alright~~?”

Substitute Head Yasuhara mumbled while he opened a closet.

“What’s alright?”

“I say… the incident where people disappeared here happened 2 months ago right? If those people got lost in here, they would definitely be already dead.”

“… perhaps.”

“I don’t want to discover corpses while wondering around this place.”

… wu. Don’t mention such unpleasant things.

“And in this type of old building, there are definitely mice around. Do you want to encounter corpses badly eaten away by mice and cockroaches?”

“Stop saying that.”

For me, putting horror aside, I really hate blood.

Bou-san smiled expansively.

“We couldn’t possibly find those bodies while walking around here. The police ‘’have’’ already searched this area.”

“Ah, is it?”

“However, it is also possible that they simply got lost.”

This huge house does indeed have a strange and complicated structure. The corridors twist and wind pointlessly; even the width of the corridors change from wide to narrow randomly. Short flights of stairs appear at random locations, sloping up or down. One would lose sense of direction in an instant.

If we didn’t draw a simple map of the house on the blackboard used to record temperatures, perhaps we too would have gotten lost here.

“Eh~. It feels like playing an RPG.”

Yasuhara said, looked around the irregularly shaped room with walls jutting in and out all over in a # shape. (tl/n: the room was described as having a “井” shape.)

“What is an ‘RPG’?”

“Role Playing Game. Taniyama-san, don’t you play PC games?”

“I don’t have such things. Are they interesting?”

“They are passable, perhaps. The two major games are “DQ” and “FF”. If new products of either game are released around January or February, University would definitely take a second place.”

Hey… hey?

Bou-san poked his head out of a window in a corner.

“Ou~~ Incredible. This window opens into the neighboring room.”

Ah?

It was only a normal window with nothing special – except for the point that the window opened into the next room instead of into the gardens.

“And blinds were also put up…”

“It should have turned out like this because of the renovations or additions… it

looks like a weird 3D dungeon.”

While Bou-san said that, Yasuhara suddenly clapped his hands.

“Are you a fan of PC games too? Have you played ‘Megami Tensei’ (女神转生) before?”

“Now that you mention it, I haven’t played it since the second series. When I am immersed in magic and beasts, I lose sight of my original goals.”

“I completely understand.”

But I don’t understand.

I looked somewhat grudgingly at the 2 people talking excitedly while I set up the thermometer. The thermometers we use here aren’t like the alcohol thermometers used in school, I mention that to be prudent.

4 degrees centigrade. The temperature is rather low, similar to all the rooms around this area. I recorded the temperature onto the blackboard. Because I don’t know what room this is, I had assigned numbers to the rooms on the map.

“It’s OK. Let’s head to the next location.”

Even though I said that, even I didn’t know where we had entered from. There were doors at the identical location on all 4 sides of the ‘#’ shaped room, and I didn’t know which door we had entered through. Che. I did ‘’not’’ bring a compass.

“Where did we come in from?”

I asked. Yasuhara and Bou-san pointed to different directions.

Such unreliable fellows.

Opening each door to check, Bou-san said.

“This is practically Winchester (Mystery) House.”

What is that?

Yasuhara replied with a question.

“Is the ‘Winchester’ you mention the Winchester of the Winchester Rifle?”

“What is that?”

Yasuhara pulled his woolen shirt, and told me in a tone unimaginable for the head of “Shibuya Psychic Research”.

“There was a gun of that name amongst the antique guns. Or rather it is still present today. Is it that?”

Bou-san nodded.

“Yes. It is the family home of the Winchesters who invented the Winchester Rifle. I don’t remember too clearly, but it was a strange and complicated house like this one. It had windows that cannot be opened, stairs that lead to nowhere, and doors that were impassible.”

“Ah, exactly the same.”

“Yeah.”

Yasuhara had a strange expression of comprehension.

“I really don’t understand the thinking of rich people. Why do they all like this type of building?”

“Apparently there was a reason for Winchester House. The truth was, if inauspicious events occurred after the construction of the house, it was not completed and renovated endlessly.”

“He~~. Then perhaps there was also some reason for this building.”

“It’d just be a joke of a house if there wasn’t a reason. Ah, this is the one, a room that we haven’t been in before.”

That said, Bou-san randomly opened a tall door.

2

This room, numbered 8, was an even stranger room.

In the very center of the large room was a small room about 2 tatamis large. Furthermore, the height of the floor was different only in that location. It was really troublesome.

I measured the temperature in the small room (numbered 8.5?) “If this was a maze there would be something in this type of room.”

“Right. Something like a treasure chest or a small box.”

… what are they talking about?

Leaving Yasuhara and Bou-san who were talking apparently very happily about such leisurely topics behind, I went out. 3 people had gathered in a group in the larger room.

Aiyah. It was the friend of famous psychics, Minami-san.

Minami-san looked at me and smiled.

“Oyo oyo. The little miss has already started work.”

“Ah, yeah…”

Minami-san looked at the small blackboard I was carrying.

“You are measuring temperatures, right?”

He said that while nodding non-stop.

“That’s really good. The measurement of temperature is the basis of paranormal investigation. That Otaku head of yours, despite being so young, does know quite a bit.”

Minami-san, who was chattering non-stop, held an alcohol thermometer in his right hand.

“… thank you. Are you measuring the temperature too, Minami-san?”

I asked. Minami-san smiled contentedly.

“Yes. Our methods are passed on directly from Professor Davis. Eh, because it is a trade secrete I can’t mention it. But it is for the sake of the development of paranormal research, so if you wish to steal my teacher you are welcome to try. One is never too old to learn.”

“Ah…”

He’s such a glib man.

Minami-san smiled at me once more, while he gently shook the thermometer, and then placed it on the dust-covered furniture.

… That~~, the alcohol in an alcohol thermometer won’t go down no matter how hard you shake it.

A woman and a younger woman stood on both sides of Minami-san. Both of them had their eyes closed and held their palms together. The woman suddenly opened her eyes and spoke.

“Boss, I’ve felt something in the room diagonally opposite (?) this one.”

“Ah ah, have you?”

Minami-san grinned, picked up the thermometer and wrote the temperature on a note. Then he nodded to us.

“Anyway, let’s all work hard. Apparently there is a prize for the group that succeeds in exorcism.”

“Ah…”

Waving his hand gently, Minami-san and the ladies left the room.

Eh~. What in the world is going on?

Although I understand very clearly that it is no good to suspect people without reason, I don’t know why, I can’t help feeling that Minami-san is behaving rather furtively…

I think that ghost-hunting is not a competition, although competitiveness is a strong part of the volunteers’ personality (true for us, at least). (tl/n: please

proofread. Chinese raw didn't make sense and I'm guessing this is what was meant.) And firstly, is there a method to measure the temperature like that using an alcohol thermometer? It has to be set up vertical to the ground, and left for 10 minutes or a couple of minutes at least. When reading the thermometer, it must be at eye level, making sure the alcohol is level with its reflection in the mirror. – Although our boss is very young, he is not the least unclear about this type of thing.

Furthermore, we do not use that type of inaccurate alcohol thermometers. We use thermometers capable of measuring up to 2 decimal places.

Is that really the teachings of that Professor Davis? Or does the professor have an undeservedly good reputation? I think that the type to be called a Professor is stricter and more rigorous than our boss; this might be the opposite of the reality. The experts are actually even more incredible, right?

I placed my on thermometer on the stand Minami-san had placed his thermometer and measured the temperature. I looked at my watch while counting the accurate countdown time. Put simply, the 'countdown time' is the time needed for the thermometer to measure the temperature accurately.

Originally, because it was rather troublesome I estimated the time required; however I can't help feeling now that I should do it properly. Compared to doing it haphazardly, doing it properly is indeed better. Eh eh.

3

After measuring the temperatures in the 10 rooms close by 3 times, we went back to the base. The huge room was piled with equipment.

“How is it?”

When asked by Naru, who was adjusting a camera, I handed the small blackboard to him.

“There isn’t any location where the temperature is particularly low. However, if there isn’t a class for drawing up floor plans, I dare say somebody will get lost.”

“I don’t need it, but it looks like someone does.”

Who said that, hey.

“I met Minami-san in Room Number 8. He was actually using a very crude method to measure the temperature.”

“You met Minami-san? When?”

It was Bou-san who asked.

“In Room Number 8. It was when Bou-san and Yasuhara-kun… no boss were in that little room playing.”

“And the Professor?”

“He wasn’t there.”

“… whatever.”

Bou-san looked somehow rather dejected.

“Doesn’t he care a lot about the Professor’s work?”

Ayako giggled and looked at John who was by the side.

“Because Takigawa-san respects the Professor greatly.”

Bou-san somehow looked embarrassed, muttering things like ‘hey’, and ‘really’. Such a cute fellow.

“The Professor is such a great person.”

Looking at the grinning Bou-san, I said. Bou-san scratched his head embarrassedly.

“At the very least, such strict investigators are very rare…”

“Is this so?”

“Yeah. He is an extremely serious person. He writes papers just like the normal scientific papers.”

“Is that very rare? Isn’t a paper just a paper?”

“About that, just writing alone won’t do it. Foreign researchers are more serious; amongst the Japanese researchers there are those who don’t even write citations.”

I don’t quite understand. However, from Bou-san’s tone it should be something not to be coughed upon.

“The Professor had a composition, called ‘Paranormal Systems’. The foreword of that book had a sentence like this, ‘With regards to research into the paranormal, there is an argument as to whether it is scientific or the tricks of a fraudster. I still do not believe it is scientific. Therefore, I believe research into the paranormal should start to be recognized and researched scientifically.’”

Eh~~. That is to say, because paranormal research is still unscientific, that is why he conducted scientific styled investigations. Isn’t that put it very concisely? Eh eh eh.

“People who believe in paranormal phenomenon insist that it is all scientific. The opposition, allowing for no explanation, denounces it as fraudsters’ tricks. The Professor has said something really acute. Because the Professor himself is a clairvoyant, he knows that paranormal phenomenon does occur.”

John nodded.

“It is like that. The fact is, that book is a very serious reference book.”

“Is it?”

So it was like that. Hence he was completely blown away by the Professor. Eh~~, what a really cute personality.

“… however.”

I tilted my head.

“Compared to what you all have just said, claiming he was taught directly by the Professor, Minami-san was measuring the temperature very crudely.”

“That’s because Minami-san’s personality is that careless.”

Ayako cut in.

“However, that person called Minami, don’t you think he is a little suspicious?”

“Ah, do you think so too, Ayako?”

“Yes, yes. I can’t help feeling that he lacks integrity and can’t warm up to him.”

“Exactly. I, too, dislike people who only brag about themselves.”

John carelessly tilted his head slightly.

“Although I have never met the Professor before, I do remember hearing that he is a very young person.”

Bou-san looked a bit angry.

“Whatever, are you suspecting him? Being a ‘Professor’, isn’t he very young?”

“What that actually is… The Professor received his title from the 龙电巴古财团 (tl/n: some fictitious academy?). There are many organizations that assist in psychical research in the west, and the 龙电巴古财团 is one of them set up recently specially for this sort of research. On one hand it gives out the title of ‘Professor’ to outstanding researchers, on the other hand it organizes lectures at universities teaching this type of subject. Professor Davis has this sort of title, that is to say it is slightly different from the regular title of ‘Professor’…”

Hn~~. It’s really complicated.

“And if the Professor came to Japan, shouldn’t it cause a huge uproar? I haven’t heard any rumors of the Professor ever coming to Japan.”

Bou-san was also frowning.

“You’ve got a point…”

“It is like this, leaving the rest aside, the Professor is after all a famous psychic.”

“That –”

I nervously tried speaking.

“Because I’ve never learnt it before I’m not too clear. Is the Professor such an incredible psychic?”

Everyone looked at me disdainfully as though it was a matter of course. Wu wu wu.

“He is very incredible. Because he himself is a researcher of spirits, he is not that active in the psychic world.”

“Oh~~”

Bou-san gazed at the ceiling.

“The Professor only performed a public PK experiment some years ago. That experiment was also recorded. Initially only official research institutes are able to access this tape. Apparently it is an experiment where a large piece of aluminum was flung onto the wall.”

“He~~”

“And then, when a son of a rich family was kidnapped, the Professor rescued that child. This story is also quite famous.”

John nodded.

“Yes. It was the son of the boss of a large American automobile company. The Professor realized that the child was buried alive by some people. Then that tycoon gifted a very large research facility to SPR.”

He~~ Amazing. He rescued a person. Isn’t that very typical?

When we were discussing these things, someone suddenly spoke behind me.

“Everyone, it looks like you’re chitchatting very happily.”

It was an unhesitating, ice cold sound.

Turning back, Naru stood there with a sarcastic smile on his face. Looking around, the number of cameras lined up on the ground had decreased.

“Yo, Naru-chan. When did you get here? Where did you go just now?”

Bou-san, with a numb expression, raised his hands, and faced Naru’s cold gaze.

“Of course it was to set up the cameras. Because I am here to work.”

… wa. He is trying to say he did not slack of and was working, perhaps.

“As for the set up, let me do it.”

I said that; Naru used his ice cold voice and spoke.

“Oya, I’m so sorry, Taniyama-san. I can’t let a female do heavy labor.”

… very cold. I could practically freeze to death.

“No, I want to do it. Please let me do it.”

4

“Where do you want the camera to be placed?”

Everyone asked while we hefted the video recorder while walking.

“In any case, use our living quarters as the center, then gradually expand the radius to ascertain a circle of safety.”

Bou-san, apparently very frustrated, spoke loudly.

“Hey hey, if it is like this, how much time will it take to completely investigate this entire building?”

“This too can’t be helped. Or do you want to run away home, Takigawa-san?”

Withdrawing from the truth presented by Naru, Bou-san hugged his head.

“… I’m sorry. It is my mistake, can you speak to me as you normally do, OK?”

An extremely sarcastic smile appeared on Naru’s face.

“Because this time it might develop into a long battle, this too cannot be helped, right?”

Really, Bou-san who spoke softly turned to look at me.

“Right, Mai. I’ve always wanted to ask you, do your parents say anything with you not being at home for such a long period of time?”

… What are you still saying at this point in time?

“You don’t attend school too, right? You’ll get reprimanded by your teacher like this.”

“I say, you’re asking me this only at this point in time? We’ve already known each other for over a year, right?”

“No, I’ve always wanted to ask you.”

“There isn’t anyone whom I have to account to at home.”

“Oya, you’ve such a complicated family environment.”

“Yeah. Because I am an orphan.”

Silence~~

It was like the scene had frozen solid. Everyone’s gaze had centered on me. Oya?

Bou-san nervously asked.

“Orphan?”

“Yeah. It is just like that.”

“Uncles and Aunts etc?”

“Not a single one. I am an unfortunate girl without any relatives. Did I shock you all?”

“… I’m shocked.”

My father did not have any relatives; my mother, too, did not have any relatives.

I’ve really lost to them. Because they are two such careless people. When both persons have no relatives, doesn’t it mean that early death runs in both families? Did you not notice even this type of thing, the pair of you?

Look, not only did my father die before I knew him, my mother too passed away while I was in secondary school. Really, ai~~

If it weren’t for a kind hearted teacher who let me board at his place, I would have ended up on the streets as a secondary school student.

“… and then?”

Bou-san asked.

“What?”

“How do you live now?”

“Ah ah. I currently earn my own living. That’s very incredible right?”

“Incredible…”

“I’m exempted from paying school fees. Our school is very kind to poor students. My living expenses depend on my scholarship and the money I get from wages. Because my salary has increased recently, my life has become more comfortable~~.”

He~ he~ he. I’ve bought a heater this winter~~. Even when I already have a kotatsu at home~~.

Bou-san suddenly hugged my head.

“Hey hey hey~~!”

“You can cry in my arms.”

What is he thinking – this Bou-san?

“I don’t need to, can you let go?”

“You can tell me at any time whenever you feel tired of life. I will willingly marry you.”

“Do you mean to say that you want to give me a regular job?”

Or rather is the job as a musician in a recording studio a regular job~? I’ve never heard that that job had annual leave or a pension or anything, so it shouldn’t be (a regular job).

“Not cute at all.”

Bou-san rapped my head once with a boo.

“Sorry. Because my life has been too hard my personality has flaws. Ah ah, I hate this world…”

Pretending to cry, boo hoo, my head sustained another hit. Whatever~~

“Your school only allows you to work because it is like this?”

“Yeah. From the start our school allows students to work. In my case, because it is to survive, my school has given me leave.”

He~ he~ he~.

Bou-san nodded.

“If when you oversleep, you tell the school you’ve gone to work…”

“Yeah yeah. I can take leave whenever I like~~.”

After I said that, I thought: crap. There were cold looks around me.

“So that’s the truth, you’re doing this to play truant. … you’ll turn stupid like that.”

It wasn’t Naru, but Bou-san who said that; but because even his accent imitated Naru’s very closely, I couldn’t help laughing out loud – despite Naru standing at one side with a blank expression.

With the corner of the second floor which was our living quarters as the center, there were 4 night vision cameras and automatic temperature recorders placed around. And besides that, there were 12 microphones set up all around. After the Mansion Explorer Team trio of Bou-san, John and Yasuhara left with tape measures and compasses to construct a floor plan, we adjusted the equipment at base. Even if it was only adjusting the cables, deciding and checking the camera angles, it was soon nearly twilight.

That day, we did not know what the other psychics were doing. After we had dinner we had a meeting at our base; then after exorcising and cleansing each room we went to bed early.

Although Naru was adamant about us not conducting investigations at night, the others apparently continued investigating deep into the night.

5

The next morning I was woken up by someone (don't ask me who) then I went to the Dining Room, gobbled down breakfast then we gathered at the base.

Lin-san, as usual, was replaying the tapes that were recorded last night. There wasn't a single tape which caught anything out of the ordinary. Occasionally it caught the image of a passing psychic peering curiously down the camera, and that was contrarily rather strange. The tapes recorded by the microphones were the same. The temperature records also appeared normal. And on the other equipment which I still don't quite understand nothing abnormal had occurred.

"Is there nothing going on?"

Yasuhara asked. Naru nooded.

"The first day is just like this. There probably isn't any danger around the area where the equipment was set up last night." Naru has and will always be of the prudent type.

Ayako looked a little dissatisfied.

"Is this alright? When we are leisurely doing this type of thing, the credit will be snatched away by the others."

"I don't particularly wish to achieve any accomplishment."

"Then, why do we doing this type of thing?"

"This is what we call volunteers. – Yasuhara-kun, Bou-san, John. You lot and Mai, continue to construct the floor plan."

This fellow, he completely doesn't take Ayako seriously.

Masako, who started acting together with us since this morning, said, "If there is anywhere I can help…"

"Please go with Matsuzaki-san and check if there are any suspicious places.

You said you've smelt the smell of blood, right? Find out where that smell is the strongest *etc.* You all have to be extremely cautious, even if you find a suspicious location, don't enter it carelessly. Report to me first."

"Understood."

"Everyone must return here in the afternoon. Right, at 11:30. Let us calibrate our watches; everyone must not be late."

Yes~ yes~. It was really like the tone of a life guidance coach, this fellow.

Despite the efforts of Bou-san, Yasuhara and John yesterday, the floor plan was still practically blank. With great effort, the corner of the Dining Room, the Base and our living quarters was drawn. Anyway we first measured the corridor to the north of the Dining Room that was skipped yesterday. We roughly measured the corridors' length, width and direction then drew it on the paper. Following that we also measured the rooms on either side of the corridor.

Just like that we started measuring from one end of the building, this time entering every room.

"Ee?"

I recorded the measurements while tilting my head.

"What's up?"

Bou-san walked over and looked at what I had recorded.

"That place was recorded wrongly."

This room was about as large as a classroom. Because the room was surrounded by corridors on three sides, and the corridors and the adjacent room had already been measured, the external measurements of the room should be very clear. If the room was measured on the outside, this room should be a rectangular room. But somehow, when the room was actually measured on the inside it was practically square shaped.

I finished explaining; Bou-san couldn't help smacking his lips.

"Not again. Ai, we have to re-do the measurements."

The trio of Bou-san, Yasuhara and John left the room to measure the room's external. The three people who came back shortly after had their heads tilted in incomprehension.

"… How is it?"

"The external measurements are accurate just like this."

"It isn't possible. Even without measuring, I can tell this room is square. The actual measurements also show it is practically a square-"

"But there isn't any mistake outside either. This is the second time we've measured so there is definitely no mistake."

Ai ai~~?

There were doors on three sides of the room. If I opened one I could estimate the thickness of the wall. And it didn't look like it was because the walls were extremely thin…

I looked at the wall without a door.

"Could this wall possibly be 3 meters thick?"

"If that's not the case we must have made a mistake from the very beginning and the error continued to be carried forward."

Just like buttoning the wrong button, Bou-san ground his teeth and said that.

Yasuhara pointed towards the wall.

"A hidden room."

… There shouldn't be, right? Please let me off that.

"Yeah~~, it's more and more like a maze."

Yasuhara somehow looked very satisfied.

"This issue will be resolved if we open a hole in the wall."

It was Bou-san who spoke such extreme words.

John talked sense into the pair of them.

"… anyway let's leave this and continue to measure. Perhaps when we measure some other parts we can find out where we had made a mistake."

Exactly.

Just like that we continued working; if there were indeed wrong measurements; we would find out and resolve it after taking more measurements. We repeated the measurements multiple times, ran around many times, in the end we were all thoroughly frustrated.

Why did they have to build such a complicated house? I really don’t understand how rich people think.

6

After many trials we had finally completed the floor plan of the first floor. By then it was almost 11:30. When we got back to base we handed the completed part of the plan to Lin-san, who entered it into the computer. In the mean time we ate lunch very hurriedly, and after agreeing to meet again at around 3 o'clock teatime, we set off once more on our Mansion Exploration Journey.

In the morning, when we started our investigation, the other psychics were all asleep; they had finally risen one by one and started their investigations. A man with a white beard hanging down to his chest held a rosary made up of beads that were as large as a fist and walked around chanting.

"Who is that?"

I asked Bou-san while we mounted the stairs.

"Don't ask me."

Yeah.

"Isn't he Mihashi-san from the xxx association?" (tl/n: the Chinese script doesn't re-state the name of the association. I'm not sure if it was meant that Yasuhara remembers the names of the people but not the association they are from, or if the Japanese to Chinese translator was being lazy. Either way, I don't suppose the names of the associations are all that important.) It was Substitute Head Yasuhara who answered.

"Oh oh, no wonder you're a freshman at an institute of the highest level of education. Such a clever boy."

"You really know how to exaggerate, aren't you a university graduate yourself, Takigawa-san?"

The university graduate in question is…

"Bou-san has graduated university?!"

Bou-san showed a very unhappy expression.

“Is the fact that I hold a bachelor degree from a university something that is so strange, ai?”

“No… ha ha. Even Bou-san had gone to university.”

“I say, in Japan they let monks attend university.”

“He~~”

That was really surprising.

“What do you all do in university? Do you practice chanting scriptures and stuff like that?”

“… this, this type of thing is also done.”

“Like if you don’t wear a Kesa you can’t attend school etc.”

I say, Bou-san looked like he was in agony.

“Miss, there are also females in the university for monks. Also, they teach English, and German, Mathematics and also Physical Education. Understand?”

“Oh~~”

Incomprehensible. What type of university is it? Let me think about it a little.

Yasuhara, also looking like he did not understand, said, “Are there early lessons in the morning as usual? Look, don’t Catholic schools in some places hold Mass or something in the mornings, right?”

“Are there still this type of schools today? My school wasn’t very religious. At most the tea served in the canteen on Hanamatsuri (Vesak Day, or Buddah’s Birthday) would be sweet tea.”

“That doesn’t count-”

“Stra, strange…”

That escaped my mouth unconsciously. Eat a bento together with sweet tea? I feel that their flavors don’t match~~.

“Unnecessary nonsense. --?”

Bou-san stopped at the turn of the corridor on the second floor.

The northerly corridor on the second floor was very narrow. Hence we ran into Bou-san's back.

"Ouch. What's up?"

Bou-san silently looked down the corridor. There were 4 figures there. Of those two people were squatting on the floor with their foreheads touching the ground, going in circles. Standing aside watching these was the man over thirty, and Ohashi-san.

"… who?"

I secretly asked Yasuhara.

"Isn't that 圣-san of the xxx association?"

Yasuhara replied immediately. Yasuhara is really clever.

The two squatting persons made circles that were the full width of the corridor, there was no way to pass. Just as we were looking at these, troubled, 圣-san lifted his head and looked our way.

"You can't pass this way."

A smile of ridicule was beneath his moustache.

"Just as you can see, an important revelation is about to occur."

… ah.

When I was smiling vaguely, somebody shook my shoulder form behind. Turning back, Yasuhara was making the sign to retreat. I nodded then everyone returned to the corridor we had come from.

There are various types of psychics, aren't there. Fortunately there isn't anybody amongst our members who does such embarrassing things…

The four of us, armed with tape measures, measured each room in sequence. What I knew after completing the measurements for the first and second floors was that the interior of this building had a lot of strange rooms. Entering the building, the rooms inside did not have things called windows. Even when there was, if it didn't open into the next room, it opened into a wall. Even though there

was electrical lights in the interior rooms, most of them were pointless bulbs, so we could only rely on the two torches we carried.

“The previous generation that renovated this place, never intended to live here at all.”

Bou-san used the torch to illuminate the surrounds of the room. This was a room about 4 tatamis large. Only a door to what was apparently a regular storeroom could be seen. There was no furniture.

“Exactly. I don’t think that anyone would want to live in this type of room.”

Yasuhara looked around the room.

Indeed, the narrow room without windows and lights is very stifling. If it were me, I wouldn’t stay in this room for even one day. – But if the rent was free I would consider it.

The second floor was more or less complete before the 3 o’clock tea time, so we returned to meet at the base. While Lin-san entered the details of the recent investigation into the computer, we sat down to have tea. Ohashi-san and his staff presented cakes and sandwiches etc; this touched us greatly.

“Talking about it, it really is a very large house.”

Ayako looked around. There was no one in the Dining Room besides us.

“Aren’t there around 20 people running all over this house? But I practically did not meet anyone.”

“Exactly. We met a few, that~~, Mihashi-san and 圣-san.”

“We met him also, that 圣. Because Masako was mocking them, a fight nearly broke out.”

… was there such a thing.

“And then, we also met a don’t-know-what’s-his-name-san. It was like he was carrying some machine and walking.”

“He~~”

After finishing tea, we set out once more to construct the floor plan. When we got to the third floor and was measuring a room, we met a bald man coming

from the entrance to the attics.

It was the monk called Imura, Yasuhara told me.

“People from Shibuya Psychic Research?”

“Yes, we are.”

Yasuhara, representing us, lowered his head.

“Collecting children one by one – can that have any use at all?”

It was such a vulgar tone, but Yasuhara took no notice of it at all. He smiled and spoke, tilting his head as though he was speaking of someone else.

“Who knows how it is. We will try our best.”

“What psychics talk about is experience. What can little children do?”

Yasuhara nodded like a model student observed by a teacher.

“We will try even harder.”

Imura sneered.

“How old are you?”

Like a model student, Yasuhara answered smartly.

“Me? I am already 332 years old this year.”

… poo.

Imura-san was momentarily stunned. Then his face turned completely red.

“Whatever, you fellow, do you take me for an idiot?”

“Not at all. Because longevity runs in my family.”

Yasuhara smiled a model student smile.

“What year were you born, tell me.”

“Ai, me? I was born in the 8th year of Hooreki. Or according to the Sexagenary cycle, the Boin(戊寅) year.”

Ah la ~~, how clever.

“You are just talking nonsense here.”

Imura-san glared at Yasuhara, but Yasuhara didn't look the least concerned.

"How annoying, you doubt the words of your elders. When I was young, if I spoke such to my elders I would get a beating. Ai ya, young people these days are really fortunate~~."

… poo poo.

"Talking about my youth, I have experienced the Great Tenmei Famine. Youth these days don't know what famine is like~~."

… poo poo poo.

"Recently there was some uproar about trade friction between Japan and America; when I was young we were still fighting about whether or not to open the country's borders. Really, at that time I thought that the future was pitch-black."

Ignoring Imura-san, who was gnashing his teeth while glaring at him, Yasuhara nodded to himself and continued speaking.

"… Every time I speak of these things, I would get scolded by my parents. They say things like 'you're clearly just a green child but you sound like it is crystal clear'. How should I put it, my parents were born around the Kenmu era. Their pet phrases are 'the Onin war was such a catastrophe', 'young people nowadays really don't understand hard work' *etc.* And if my grandfather were to speak, he would probably say that ''that'' was nothing compared to the Genpei War or something. My grandmother on my father's side would then say only the Jinshin War was really scary. Hey, hey, are you listening?"

Imura-san's shoulders were shaking; he didn't have the opportunity to shout.

"My great-great-grandmother on my mother's side had her home burnt during the fall of the Yamataikoku. Until she passed away she has always said that it was very sad, it really was *etc.* – Aiya? Imura-san, where are you going? And then, there's my great-great-great-grandfather on my father's side~~"

Face completely blank, Imura-san stomped back to the corridor.

When Imura-san's figure couldn't be seen anymore, needless to say we all burst out in laughter.

7

In the evening, before sundown we had more or less completed measuring the third floor and the attic, and we returned to base. After we handed the drawing to Lin-san we went for dinner. While we were completely absorbed in eating, suddenly somebody addressed us.

“Erm, Shibuya-san?”

It was the teacher from the What’s-its-name University.

Naru wasn’t there. Just as I was about to say that he was still at base, Yasuhara hurriedly raised his head.

“… yes.”

Ah, it is like that. Yeah, it’s really complicated.

“I’m really sorry to disturb you while you are having your meal.”

“It’s nothing much, please don’t mind.”

She held a cup of coffee, and sat straight next to Substitute Head Yasuhara.

“The equipment placed in the corridors are your belongings, right?” (she calls Yasuhara ‘Otaku-san’) “Yes.”

“It really is rather scientific.”

“Passably so.”

A generous and gracious smile hung on the Sensei’s face.

“I feel that you don’t look like a strange psychic, that’s why I’ve come to ask your help.”

It was said in such a gentle tone, but aren’t the words said very unpleasant?

“I want to try holding a séance tonight. If possible, I hope to receive the help of you and everyone here.”

Yasuhara thought for a moment.

“… I understand. Let me offer our help.”

Just as Yasuhara nodded in agreement, 圣-san, seated across the table, started speaking loudly.

“If you need a medium we have some very good ones around, do you need our help?”

… Ee. Was that the medium that was turning in circles?

Sensei smiled.

“I don’t need it.”

Because Sensei used such definite lines, 圣-san appeared a little angry. However, Sensei did not appear the least concerned. She smiled at Yasuhara and continued.

“9 o’clock, is that all right?”

“Yes. And the location?”

“Because this place is too noisy, we’ll be in a vacant room somewhere nearby.”

“I understand.”

Sensei courteously bowed her head and left the Dining Room; we nodded and watched her leave.

… Can we do this, making our own decisions and agreeing to this type of thing? I really wanted to ask Yasuhara that; but圣-san was seated right across the table. At this point Naru, who had just passed by Sensei, and Lin-san, entered.

Yasuhara shot a glare at圣-san then raised his hand.

“Narumi-kun.”

“Yes, is there anything?”

Wu wu. Naru answering like this is really disgusting.

“Just now Professor Igrashi said that she will hold a séance tonight. I will attend; what about you?”

… Yeah. That was a really beautiful way of phrasing the question.

Naru thought slightly.

“Let me attend too. Anyway there aren’t any important jobs that need to be done tonight.”

After dinner and all the way until the start of the séance, all of us gathered at the base.

Naru, who had quietly followed behind Yasuhara, underwent a 180 degrees change in his attitude the moment the base’s door was closed. Using his usual arrogant attitude, he ordered Lin-san to present the floor plans for everyone to see.

Lin-san operated the computer, and the floor plan appeared on the specialized display. The floor plan that we had worked so hard to construct appeared.

“How many rooms are there?”

“Including the attic there are 106.”

One hundred… and six?! Were there that many?! No wonder it too so much of our time.

Naru stacked pointed at the display. Blue lines surrounded the floor plan which was drawn in white. “This is the buildings’ external surroundings.”

The buildings’ external surroundings. That is to say the size of the buildings’ external grounds?

“Doesn’t it completely not match?”

Naru’s cold gaze was directed at us.

“We don’t know. We really made the measurements seriously.”

Questioningly, he turned to look at Bou-san and the rest. Although everyone nodded in agreement, Naru wouldn’t accept that saying because of that. Indeed, the external measurement of the building and the outline of the floor plan did not match at all. More exaggeratedly there was 3 rooms worth of empty space between the floor-plan and the external measurements.

“Start talking. This is?”

There were some blue spaces between the rooms drawn in white. That was the parts that were left despite the measurements of the rooms not matching.

“That’s why we say we don’t know. We seriously measured it and it was just like this.”

I calmly explained the situation to Naru. This really wasn’t our fault. Naru thought for a long time, then said, “It’s really a thorny problem.”

After saying that,

“Tomorrow repeat the measurements accurately to check.”

“Take the measurements to check.” It is not this. “Measure it for me” is more correct. Who do you think is actually doing the work here? Really.

8

At 9 o'clock we all gathered at a room approximately 8 tatamis in size next to the Dining Room. A round table and quite a few stools had been moved into the room. Igrashi sensei and her assistant, Minami-san and Professor Davis and a lady assisting had already gathered there.

"Ah…"

The one who said that was Bou-san, who had turned bashful the moment he saw the Professor. Oh He He. He's a really cute fellow.

Looking as though it was a matter of course, Minami-san was setting up the camcorder. Apparently he had said that he was going to record the proceedings of the séance. The camcorder in question was just a very ordinary camcorder for home use. Looking at the monitor, Minami-san said,

"It's a little dark. Can't we have a little more light?"

What is he saying? When Igrashi-sensei heard him, she momentarily glared, wide-eyed, at him.

"What are you saying about increasing the brightness? During the séance we will only be using candles."

"Ee? Is that so?"

"This is a matter of course. Because spirits dislike bright lights. A single candle will be used, just that."

"That really is troubling…"

"Don't you have a night vision camera? I only requested your presence because you said you had a camera capable of recording the events as evidence."

Minami-san said viciously,

“No, I just didn’t bring that this time…”

What is he chirping about?

Suddenly, Naru spoke.

“Boss, could we bring our video recorder over here? We still have some that aren’t in use.”

Naru addressed that to Yasuhara. Substitute Yasuhara, as a spectator, nodded very magnanimously.

“Ah ah, doing it like this will be great. If Igrashi-sensei doesn’t object…”

Igrashi-sensei smiled.

“Yes, I’m delighted if you could do that.”

“Then, we shall go and move that over. – Mai.”

… Yes~. I just knew it would turn out like this… Really.

Due to the big uproar, I moved the night vision camera and the automated chase camera that had not been set up over. This ‘automated chase camera’ is calibrated to the thermometer; it is something that will automatically capture the areas in the room that are at a lower than normal temperature during the séance.

“This really is some impressive equipment.”

Igrashi-sensei’s eyes gleamed at the sight of this; Yasuhara maintained a generous, witty expression throughout.

“Thank you very much for your appreciation.”

The equipment was finally set up at around 10 o’clock. Candles were lit on the round table, the lights switched off, and then the séance begun.

“Professor Davis, Minami-san, Shibuya-san, please take a seat by the table.”

The 3 persons mentioned by Igrashi-sensei approached the table. The Shibuya-san here refers to Yasuhara. Ah ah, it’s really complicated. Besides them there was also Igrashi-sensei and her disciple Suzuki-san. The summoning was to be

done by these people. The rest of us hung back around the walls to observe.

Candles and white paper were arranged on the table; Suzuki-san wore a blindfold while holding a pen.

“Please hold the hand of the person besides you.”

The 4 people seated at the table other than Suzuki-san held each other’s hands, forming a circle of joint hands disrupted at Suzuki-san’s position.

“After breathing deeply please summon the spirit here. Summoning the spirit within this room…”

It was so silent that one could have heard a pin drop. There was the sound of the automated chase camera adjusting its mobile arm after finding a focus, the sound of the motor of the constantly running camera; the only sounds that could be heard were only these minute noises.

“To the ones living in this building, please borrow the hands of this girl and let us hear your inner voices.”

The silence was deep. Suzuki-san didn’t respond at all; her hand holding the pen was trembling slightly. Igrashi-sensei used a calm voice to call out a few times, and a long period of time elapsed. It was so long that it made us observers by the side frustrated.

… will spirits etc really come?

Just as I grumbled such, silently, a squeaking sound suddenly rang out. More intense than the sound, was the pen in Suzuki-san’s hand hit the paper. Everyone held their breaths; Suzuki-san’s hand moved in large strokes, writing black words on the B4 paper.

Everyone leaned forward. Igrashi-sensei lifted sheet after sheet of paper beside her. The pen continued to move. I couldn’t see the words on the paper.

Then, there was a sudden bang. It was as though the room was hit from the outside. A thin haze of dust floated down from the ceiling.

“… what’s going on?”

Minami-san stood up. Igrashi-sensei spoke in a severe tone.

“You can’t move now. Don’t be shaken, calm down.”

Despite that being said, we couldn’t help feeling unsettled. Only Suzuki-san and Yasuhara were seated at the table calmly.

The sound of ice shattering resounded through the room. It was a clear cut sound like ‘piack’. ‘Dong’, was the solid sound of one side of the table was lifted and set down again, wobbling. At the same time the candles were toppled and their faint light was extinguished. Although I felt there was someone at the table toppling a chair with the table’s intense movement, I couldn’t tell clearly who it was.

“There’s no problem. Please, don’t move…”

Igrashi-sensei lamented.

As though that sound was a sign, the room resounded with knocking sounds on the walls or the floor. Who amongst us was knocking? This wasn’t a possibility. It wasn’t a sound that could be made by one or two persons knocking on the walls. Five persons? How many? Perhaps many.

Suddenly there was a gentle pounding on my shoulder. Even if I turned my head there was only a pitch black room. I should be able to see something. That was the feeling of someone patting my shoulder. Following that there were a few more similar hits. With the lament of a man as the beginning, the room became filled with awkward shouts.

“Naumakusanmandabazaradankan.”

That was Bou-san’s clear voice. Then all at once the sounds stopped. The previous uproar was as though it hadn’t happened. Following that the lights suddenly turned on. It was Naru who turned on the lights.

“… What was that just now…?”

Ayako said. Minami-san was underneath the table, Professor Davies was also glued to the wall, and even Yasuhara was holding the edge of the table, wearing a stiff expression.

“It should be that the sprits were successfully summoned.”

Is it like this then, spirits? Then, that sound was a spirit noise. – Whatever, aren't I calm? Because I'm already used to it.

Suzuki-san was still wearing the blindfold in a daze. Igrashi-sensei stood up and removed the blindfold. Suzuki-san looked completely ignorant of what had happened.

In the end, in the course of that disturbance, of those seated at the table only Yasuhara did not stand up, and the only ones who did not lament fearfully were us, the members of "Shibuya Psychic Research". Our group are really calm after all. This couldn't be because we've already gone through many dangerous experiences, could it?

Yasuhara picked up a piece of paper on the table, then passed it to Naru. Naru took the paper, on which was wrote,

"Please Rescue Me".

There were only 3 words.

Gathering the papers which were scattered on the floor; only those 3 words were messily written on those papers.

"Please Rescue Me…?"

What did it mean? Was it written by a spirit? Whom was it asking help from?

"Hey."

Bou-san showed me the paper he had picked up. On it was written the four words,

"I don't wanna die" (tl/n: I'm just trying to fit "I don't want to die" into 4 words.)

And it was even written in red lines. Just like blood.

Checking everyone's hands, there wasn't a single person who was injured. If that was the case, then who wrote those words in blood?

"Boss, let's replay the camera footage taken just now."

After Naru said that to Yasuahara, we returned to base. Igrashi sensei and Suzuki-san also came along. Minami-san and Professor Davies should have also left the room together with us, but they left without my noticing.

Naru and Lin-san expertly set up the tapes and discs containing the data. Very soon the scenario of the séance was playing on the television on the stand. Very strangely the picture turned white, and it felt like the size of the grains was a special artifact of the ultra-sensitive video recorder.

The time from the start until Suzuki-san's hand started moving, although I felt that a long time had elapsed, was only 6 minutes, according to the clock on the picture.

"What type of sensation was that?"

Igrashi-sensei asked. Suzuki-san tilted her head.

"It was like my hand was pulled by the pen. If I let go of the pen I wouldn't know where it would end up, it was approximately that sensation."

An intense noise was projected by the loudspeakers. Simultaneously, the image of room and the ceiling from the thermo-integrator changed bit by bit into deep blue. The thermo-integrator is a piece of equipment that assigns a color to regions of the same temperature and combines it into an image. Places that were yellow had the highest temperature, places that were blue had low temperatures… Comparing the image to the scale on the side, it could be read that the temperature had descended to approximately 3 degrees.

In the image the table rose high and started shaking. Although the glow from the candles had been extinguished, the camera continued recording, depending on the ray of light that leaked in beneath the door from the corridor.

Pieces of paper fluttered down from the table. Despite that, Suzuki-san's hand continued moving. Depending on the momentum of the moving pen, the papers dropped piece by piece from the table. Looking at the recording, we could clearly see that it was Minami-san who had knocked over the chair, and it was Professor Davies who shouted and screamed. Yasuhara was motionless, as though rooted to the ground.

"Young man, you're really the cool one."

Bou-san said.

“He he he. Because I’ve got a delayed reaction.”

Whatever. Yasuhara puffed up his chest with an unreasonable arrogance.

“Stop.”

Naru suddenly raised his sharp voice. Lin-san stopped the play-back.

“Rewind to the scene at 53 seconds and replay that.”

Lin-san rapped on the keys of the computer. The images appeared in reverse, and the piece of paper jumped back onto the table.

“What is it?”

“That piece of paper.”

Then, the picture stopped. The paper slowly floated down. It was a blank white paper flipping over.

“Ah!”

I couldn’t control my shout.

10:16:02pm. The blank white paper turned over, and when it turned back once more, a few words were written on it. Despite the grainy picture we could tell it was words written in a row; it was the piece of paper on which “I don’t wanna die” was written.

There wasn’t a scratch on anyone’s body. That was to be expected, because that wasn’t something written by a human in that room.

9

Once again we set up equipment in the room that was used for the séance, and then we left that place. Naru resolutely forbade us to conduct investigations at night. Igrashi-sensei looked at our equipment for a moment, then sighed regretfully, then returned to their bedroom with Suzuki-san who had been warned by Naru. It was like Naru had turned rather neurotic…

Masako was the same; after the séance she did not speak a word. After the lot of us returned to the bedroom, with much difficulty we finally showered in a toilet with hot water, then it was about time to turn in.

“Masako, how are you?”

Masako wore a dragonfly patterned pajama and buried herself in her covers.

“Are you feeling ill?”

“I can smell the stench of blood.”

“Again?”

Masako stared at me.

“Not only do I smell it. It’s like my body and my hair are all drenched in blood. How can everyone behave as though everything is all right?!”

I’m really sorry we can’t sense spirits.

“That room… was clearly so smelly I wanted to vomit.”

“Hey, did that start before the noises began?”

I asked. Masako opened her eyes as though she suddenly saw the light.

“… it began after that.”

“If that’s the case isn’t that a spirit smell?”

“Perhaps…”

Spirit smell, although this sounds strange, refers to the smells brought by spirits. If the smell that Masako says she has smelt since yesterday is due to the presence of spirits nearby…

“Hey, have you seen spirits yet?”

“I’ve seen them. But it’s just a vague feeling and I can’t see them clearly. When I think I’m going to see them, I smell the stench of blood and I can’t concentrate…”

“Is this spirit smell suspicious?”

“… it might be so.”

What’s going on – Masako and I are talking. Isn’t this a rare occasion for me?

“What about you, Mai?”

“Ai?”

“… Have you felt anything?”

This was a completely unexpected line for me, who has always played a supporting row.

“… why do you ask me this?”

I couldn’t help asking back. Masako looked furious.

“I’m just asking for another opinion from another person. My personality and my capabilities are not to be discussed in the same breath.”

“Another… opinion? From me?”

Masako turned her head away unhappily.

“Because in the previous incident, you were the only one who saw the same vision as I did.”

… Oh. So it’s like this. He he he. I don’t know why, I feel very happy.

“He he. Thank you. – But this time it won’t do. I haven’t felt any~thing at all. Last night I didn’t dream and slept straight through the night.”

Naru has said before that I might have ESP. But there’s the small imperfection that I can only use it in my dreams. It’s almost like saying that I can save people

when I doze off; even if I were praised, it feels like it is just someone else's business.

"Is this so… Then perhaps it isn't as dangerous as I imagined."

"How can it be? Last night didn't all of us refrain from moving around? There are protective seals properly placed in the rooms. I can't be sure but it might even be because of that."

As Masako tilted her head slightly in thought, Ayako returned from the bathroom after her bath.

"What's up? You're getting on well."

As I was about to say 'he he, not bad eh?', "You must be joking. I couldn't get on well with this type of person."

That was Masako's infuriating line.

This, this fellow…

"Isn't calling me 'this type of person' to my face very discourteous?"

"I couldn't possibly have used such uncouth language. 'This type of person', was what I said."

"I am 'this type of person', I'm really sorry for that."

"I didn't mean to say you're a bad sort. This is what is called 'ingrained prejudice'; you think others are just out to antagonize you."

"Your personality isn't the least bit cute."

"But I'm beautiful and capable."

Re… really not cute at all!

"Why do you hate me to this extent? If you have any reasons could you say them out loud?"

"You know them yourself."

"How could I know?!"

"Ah la, even your brain isn't working too well."

Really, such redundant nonsense. (tl/n: agreed. I really don't know what

they're talking about back there. If anyone cares that much you're welcome to try for a better translation.) Although I really am not too bright. Yeah~~, my face and figure are also not out of the ordinary.

Ai ai, are we fighting a mutual grudge match? Hey, stand up. Don't ignore me and fall asleep. Argue with me properly, Masako.

I was just about to wake her up.

"When did the two of you start to get on so well?"

Because of this line from Ayako, I was suddenly felt momentarily weak.

Which part of our relationship looks like we get on well?

… Really, forget it, do as you please. I'm going to sleep. Who cares about you, hn.

Then we all went to sleep. Of course, we were the only ones who did not investigate and slept; the other psychics should have planned to continue investigating through the night. Many times various footsteps passed by our door.

Waking up after a dreamless sleep the next morning, what was awaiting us was a piece of shocking news.

– Suzuki Naoko-san had vanished.

Chapter 3: ‘Hide and Seek’

(tl/n: I know the title on the front page says 'Hidden Ghost', but the Chinese raw does say 'Hide and Seek'. I'm not too sure which to go with.)

1

“Has anyone seen Suzuki-san? Hey, has no one seen her?” It was Igarashi-sensei who asked us, who were gathered in the dining room, that, with an embarrassed look in the morning.

“It shouldn’t be that she ran home on her own. And there wasn’t anyone who saw her leave. Her luggage is also left in the room. Even her contact lens case is also…”

Yasuhara had Igarashi-sensei seated next to him. He had the servants bring forth a cup of red tea, then placed the red tea in front of Igarashi-sensei.

“Please calm down. Are you a little better? Breathe deeply. Do you take sugar or milk with you tea?”

Igarashi-sensei shook her head.

“Just take a sip. Ok, drink, then breathe deeply. Ok?”

Igarashi followed Yasuhara’s instructions to the letter. She took a deep breath.

“I’m really sorry. I gave in completely to panic…”

“No need to apologize. I understand that you are very worried about Suzuki-san. When did Suzuki-san’s absence start?”

“She wasn’t around when I got up this morning. Due to my advanced age she is always by my side. When I woke up at daybreak, she was still sleeping soundly. Then…”

“About what time was ‘daybreak’?”

Vaguely mumbling to herself, Igrashi-sensei shook her head.

“And what time did you get up?”

“7 am this morning.”

It was now 10 am. She had already disappeared for at least 3 hours.

Yasuhara summoned the head servant, and asked if he had seen Suzuki-san. Including Ohashi-san, not a single servant had seen Suzuki-san. ‘What was the possibility that she had left the mansion?’ was what was put to Ohashi-san.

“Basically, the front door is locked from the inside, and there hasn’t been a scenario where the lock has been opened. I think it’s impossible that she has gone outside.”

“What should we do?”

Igarashi-sensei covered her face with both hands. Yasuhara gently patted sensei’s shoulder.

“If that’s the case, Suzuki-san must be somewhere in this mansion. Perhaps she only got lost, and is daydreaming where she stands now. It’s still too early to consider her missing. In conclusion, let us search a little first.”

Yasuhara said that then turned towards Naru.

“Narumi-kun, is that all right?”

Naru nodded.

Before noon, we shouted Suzuki-san’s name while splitting up to comb the house. Even after playing the tapes recorded the previous night did not show a hint of Suzuki-san. Furthermore, for some unknown reason, the cameras were cut off their power source at 7am this morning. As a result, the night vision cameras were of practically no use in our search for Suzuki-san.

We walked through countless rooms, and even opened things like cabinets to search. Listening closely after shouting for Suzuki-san brought no reply. We couldn’t find her anywhere. Igarashi-sensei and I went to wake the other psychics up, and questioned them about Suzuki-san. Not a single person in the mansion had encountered Suzuki-san.

“I haven’t seen her since the séance.”

This was Minami-san’s reply. Igarashi-sensei grasped his pajamas and refused to let go.

“Can you ask the Professor, Professor Davies? If it’s the Professor, he might know of something…”

Saying that, Igarashi-sensei started frantically searching for something in her shirt pocket.

“Right, I’ve been always carrying this…”

Igarashi-sensei produced a small, cylindrical object from her pocket. That was a contact lens case.

“Take this to the Professor. If it’s the Professor he should know where Suzuki-san is right…?”

Oh yes, the Professor is a clairvoyant – a psychic who, through an object, can read its owners’ past and future.

Minami-san accepted the contact lens case with a grudging expression, and took it towards the Professor who was sitting on his bed looking over. Minami-san handed the case to the Professor, then exchanged a few words with him in English. The Professor shook his head.

“Apparently he can’t see from this type of object.”

Minami-san shrugged.

“If that’s the case… what type of object can he…”

“The Professors’ clairvoyance is limited to items that were worn on the person at the time of disappearance.”

Items that are worn on the person at the time of disappearance… we couldn’t possibly have something like that, unless we were exceptionally lucky!

I massaged Igarashi-sensei’s – who had covered her face with both hands – shoulders.

Whatever, although saying such is a little insulting to Bou-san, but the Professor is a completely unimpressive person. At the very least he should have taken the case, and tried his best to see for us, couldn’t he? If something that was worn at the time of disappearance could have been easily found, even the police could have done something.

In the end, even after searching into the afternoon, we couldn’t find a trace of Suzuki-san.

Minami-san said:

“She could have fled home after last night’s séance left some frightening memories.”

Mihashi-san said:

“Young people these days all lack a sense of responsibility.”

Although I felt very angry, I couldn’t tell them they were wrong. If that were the case then everything would be fine, was what I thought in my heart. Compared to believing that Suzuki-san had vanished, it would be better to simply believe she was irresponsible.

“… perhaps it could be that way.”

It wasn’t just anyone who said that, but Igarashi-sensei.

“Yeah. Perhaps she’d gone back. Ah, I’ll give her home a call after I get back to check. I really must scold her properly…”

In the end, those words marked a turning point, and brought the search for Suzuki-san to a close.

2

“Is doing this all right?”

Everyone was gathered at the Base, and it was Bou-san who spoke.

“There isn’t any choice either. The fact is that we couldn’t find Suzuki-san too…”

“We could have possibly missed her. Can anyone say for certain that we’ve searched this idiotically huge house completely?”

“How is that possible? Then are you saying that Suzuki-san has hid herself? If that’s not the case, we’ve already shouted for her, at the very least she’d respond a little, right?”

“And there’s the possibility she couldn’t respond to us.”

“Why?”

“This, I don’t know either.”

While Bou-san mumbled to himself, Naru spoke softly.

“Only the case for the contact lenses were left; by her own will she got up and went to a certain place – this point is undisputed. Of course, there’s also the possibility of leaving through the window or some other method…”

… yeah.

“What concerns me are those blank spaces… If there are some entry into those hidden rooms, Suzuki-san may have gotten lost there. Whether it is actually errors in measurement or some other reason, it is better to check it once more.”

We checked last night’s tapes once more, but there weren’t any signs of suspicious activity. Having lost the trail, we could only measure the house once more. This time even the thicknesses of the walls were accurately measured. If

this still did not match the diagram, then proper measuring equipment would be needed.

“Where could she have run off to?”

We were currently in a second floor room. Bou-san suddenly asked me this. I was speechless for a moment.

“Suzuki-san?”

While I replied as such, I used a safety pin and knocked on the wall. It was exactly 1 meter from the floor. Drawing a string from the diagonal of the room, Bou-san picked up a compass.

“Aah. Why do you think she would vanish?”

“What do you mean by ‘why’?”

“Did she vanish of her own will, or was she forced to disappear?”

“Haven’t 2 persons already disappeared from this place? Suzuki-san is the third. … As expected this is the good work of spirits. – How many degrees?”

Bou-san measured the angle between the torch-light illuminated compass and the string.

“26°. – That spirit, didn’t it say last night, ‘save me’ or something.”

“… Yeah.”

I drew a diagonal on the diagram, and recorded the angle, while saying, “And there was also, ‘I don’t want to die’. That spirits actually not want to die and what not, really makes one think it strange.”

“Yeah, the supposed spirits could also possibly not know that they are already dead and loiter in this world.”

“He…”

“What I’m concerned about is the discontinuity between the pleading of the spirits to humans for rescue and the action of the spirits that cause people to vanish.”

“That too.”

John, who was measuring the floor with a ruler, nodded somewhere in the darkness.

“Spirits that hope for help basically want to get noticed by others in order to do something. And then, there’re the spirits that are overly impatient and have done something bad. Because hoping for help after calling thus for and summoning people is also normal.”

“Really? What would it do after making people disappear? If there aren’t any people in this house, there wouldn’t be anyone who can help it.”

Yasuhara, who was helping John, who was holding the torch, stood up.

“3.21 meters. – This ‘spirit’, could it possibly take such theoretical actions?”

“This, I can’t say for sure. It’s also common for spirits to lie. But it always feels very strange.”

John, too, nodded.

“0.35 meters. – With regards to spirit matters and the existence of spirits, there are really a lot of theories. However, the spirit believes Suzuki-san is someone who could help it; if we think like that, isn’t there a chance that Suzuki-san could have been brought away because of that?”

I wrote the numbers on the diagram, while saying, “Didn’t the spirits here say ‘save me’? I think it has always said that. However, until now no one has heard it. Then…”

John clapped his hands.

“‘Ah’, the spirit thinks, ‘this person who heard my words last night, this person can help me.’”

“… this, won’t this hypothesis do?”

“Don’t ask me.”

As we moved to the next room, Yasuhara said,

“How about this? The one who heard the spirits’ voices… or rather, the one who wrote them down, was Suzuki-san, and the one who vanished is also Suzuki-san. For example, the words last night weren’t spoken by spirits, but were

written randomly by Suzuki-san, hence she ran away because she was afraid of being exposed."

"Rejected. If that's the case how would you explain the words written in blood? And the noises?"

"Ah, yes. Then, what about this? Because Suzuki-san wrote those things on her own accord, the spirits threw a tantrum. Because Suzuki-san was afraid of these, she ran away."

"Even so this does not explain those words written in blood."

"… Ah, yes. The probability of that being a prank is minute."

Yasuhara mumbled to himself while he used the tape measure to measure the floor's dimensions. Just at that time, John suddenly shouted.

"Wah!"

"What's up?"

Bou-san shone the torch over there. We saw John, who had apparently fallen over and was frantically pacing around.

"Over here, the ground has sunk down."

Ai?

Using the torch we looked closely at the place John was pointing to, and saw that beneath the thick layer of dust there was a slight drop.

"What is this?"

Yasuhara gently removed the dust around that area. There was a rectangular cover made of wood. When Yasuhara gently pressed on it, it sank gently a bit more.

"This is already rotten. It's really lucky that you didn't fall in."

While saying that, Yasuhara gently opened the cover.

Beneath the cover we could see a metal ladder, which extended into the darkness beneath.

“… There’s a room beneath.”

Bou-san sprawled at the edge, and shone the torch below.

I looked at the floor plan, relying on the light of John’s torch.

“Isn’t that place near to the wall which we said was strange yesterday? It’s located about at the upper end of that blace.”

“The strange wall… the wall which was 3 meters thick?”

“Yeah.”

Bou-san stared down the hole without moving.

“Is it because there are hidden rooms? It’s because of these that the diagrams do not match.”

“Could it be… that Suzuki-san is here?”

“That shouldn’t be. If she was there should be footprints or signs of movement in the dust.”

“… and there’s that.”

Bou-san nodded with a tense expression.

“Right, let’s go down to take a look. Young man, could I trouble you to illuminate it.”

Handing the torch to Yasuhara, Bou-san climbed down the ladder calmly. He really has courage.

“How’s it? Is there anyone?”

“No, no one. It feels like it’s a very small room.”

Looking from the top, it was a small and narrow room about 3 tatami’s length. Relying on the illumination of the torch, we could see some soft things scattered on the floor.

“… Bou-san, what are those?”

I pointed at the things that were piled into a mountain. Bou-san used the corner of a table (?!) to prod it.

“… I’m not sure, it looks like bedding.”

Bedding? In that type of room?

“The damp is incredible. These floorboards won’t do either. They’re dripping wet.”

While saying that, Bou-san climbed up the ladder. When he got back to the room above, Bou-san held a rag-like item in a hand.

“What’s that?”

“I don’t know.”

Bou-san replied while he removed the dust. The strong smell of mould from the narrow room burst forth.

“It’s an overcoat.”

It was a long garment made of thick cloth. It looked, indeed, like an overcoat. Bou-san, who was ruffling through the garment, suddenly stopped.

“There’s a name embroidered here.”

Yasuhara shone the torch on it.

It looked like there was something written on the white cloth on the inside of the collar. The words couldn’t be clearly seen under the light of the torch.

“We can’t see it here. Let’s take it to a brighter place to take a look.”

We brought the over coat to a room facing the outer side of the building. We washed the part of the garment with the label in a nearby washroom. With great difficulty we could finally see the words written in ink on cloth which had changed color.

“Miyama Benevolent Hospital Attached Secured Facility”

“Isn’t that the hospital built 2 generations before?”

He was a great man who even did work in charity.

“Why would this type of thing be in this type of place?”

“Solution 1: That room was used as a rubbish dump for unwanted things.”

Aiyoh, Bou-san had that disdainful look.

“Rejected. Anything else?”

“The patients from that facility lived there in hiding.”

… There were things that appeared like beddings there.

“Why would they live in hiding in such a place?”

“Don’t ask me. Ah, there’s the possibility that room is a sickroom of some sort.”

“I say.”

Although we conjectured like this, of course we didn’t know the truth.

However, we found the existence of the hidden room, and this should also be considered a great feat, right?

3

We returned to base, and reported the whole story of finding the overcoat to Naru. Naru looked extremely disgusted.

"… hidden rooms… that's a really thorny problem."

Yeah, that's my opinion too.

"And the overcoat in question?"

"This one. It's filthy."

Naru paid no attention, and received that overcoat with his white hands. He turned up the label on the collar, and then proceeded to ruffle through the pockets and other places. After repeatedly ruffling through it numerous times, "There's something here."

It was in the inner pocket of the coat. Naru pulled out a thin sheet of something.

It looked like a folded up piece of paper. Naru gently opened that battered sheet.

"Hey, see here."

Bou-san leaned forward.

Although this paper had turned very black, we could still identify it as a paper currency. Naru held it against the window to allow the sunlight to pass through the note.

"There're words written on it."

Saying that, Naru handed the note to Bou-san. Bou-san took the note, and looked at it held to the sunlight as Naru had done. I looked on from the side. Quite a few words could have been seen. At first it looked like two lines of text, however only some disjointed words could be seen. From left to right the words

that could be identified were, “吧(ba3, used at the end of a sentence, example: OK, right?)、走(zou3, walk)、了(liao3/le4, already)、浦(pu3, beach)、被(bei4, blanket, or indicates done by)、听(ting1, listen)、死(shi3, die)、都(dou1, capital city, or collective, meaning ‘all’, ‘every’)、这(zhe4, this)、来(lai3, come)…” (tl/n: I’ve given the meanings of the common use of the words here. Where joint with other characters, which are, at this point, unseen, different meanings are possible.) “The meaning is not clear.”

Bou-san and I unconsciously looked face to face.

Naru showed a very dark look.

“… what was the purpose of doing something like this…?”

Who? And for what?

2 of the words left an impression: “死(shi3, die)、都(dou1, capital city, or collective, meaning ‘all’, ‘every’)”.

(tl/n: the characters here are listed from left to right, but in Chinese and Japanese, the writing is traditionally from right to left. If we put the 2 characters that left an impression on Mai together, we get a fragment that could possibly mean “everyone dies”.)
In the remaining time, we frantically continued measuring. Up until the sun set we finished a part of the first storey. Handing the numbers to Lin-san, we went to the Dining Room. When we were gulping down our food, Igarashi-sensei spoke to us.

Sensei appeared to have spent the day worrying about Suzuki-san. She had called Suzuki-san’s Tokyo home, but found that Suzuki-san did not return home, and was currently very worried. Should she make a missing person report to the police now, was what she asked Yasuhara. Yasuhara would be considered very young even in the role of Sensei’s son. The image of Sensei consulting one so young showed her discomfiture, and was somehow heart wrenching.

Seeing Igrashi-sensei like this made me feel bad, so I quietly left the Dining Room and returned to the base myself. At base, Lin-san continued to work in silence.

“Lin-san, I’m done with dinner, do you want to switch shifts?”

Although I asked him like this, he replied, “No need.”

It was a very cool answer. Really…

I say, if two persons are together but do not speak, the atmosphere would become very tense, so I told Lin-san about Igarashi-sensei’s problem. In response, Lin-san’s replies were very cool. He only nodded in acknowledgement, and didn’t even grunt.

“… now that we’re at it, you’re Chinese.”

I said that bitterly. Lin-san stared at me.

“… So?”

So… with this response even I feel very difficult.

“I always feel, ‘it’s very incredible’, is what I think. (tl/n: come on, think or feel- which?) If you could have told me earlier I would be great –”

Lin-san looked at me with a very cold expression.

“Why?”

“What ‘why’… I don’t say this with any deep meaning…”

I don’t. I only wanted to say so.

“… no warmth at all…”

“I hate the Japanese.”

To be said to be hated by someone all of a sudden, I jumped. I looked blankly at Lin-san.

“… why?”

Why did he make such a general statement of hate?

“Don’t you know what the Japanese did in China previously?”

Wuuu. That is, in the past the Japanese committed all sorts of atrocities. And the adults, till today, still refuse to apologize, and continue to play the fool.

Lin-san continued to show no expression.

“Since I hate the Japanese, I don’t feel happy living surrounded by Japanese.”

… does he need to say it like that?

“I completely understand what you are saying, and I think it should be like this. However, aren’t these things all already past?”

“Excuses like this make one even more unhappy.”

Wuuuu. Japan was indeed in the wrong. As to that, it is forcing entry into someone else’s home, then forcing the people there to do some terrible things. For example, it’s like a vicious bandit. – Despite this, “However, didn’t China have things like the Mongol Invasion? Europe too, has a history of invading and being invaded; isn’t history repeatedly like that?”

“Therefore the things done by the Japanese can be forgiven?”

“I didn’t say that! A mistake is a mistake! Japan was wrong to invade China. But if a grudge is continued to be borne like this, even Japan has a right to hate. If the world is filled with vengeance, won’t all the countries have to hate each other for eternity?”

Lin-san did not speak.

“I think this type of things have no good. Facts are facts. Japan did a bad thing, this is a fact, and I think is something that we need to remember. However, to hate or detest other people as a result, and to always say this type of words, then wouldn’t we never be able to get along? Wouldn’t that end in a cycle of hate?”

Aaah, that wasn’t said well at all.

“If you say such hateful words to me because you hate me then it can’t be helped. However, I can’t accept it if you hate me simply because I’m Japanese. Was your father or mother killed then? Was it not like that? I think it’s probably something long ago like that. To be constrained by something so long ago, and say that you hate so many people en mass, is foolish behavior. I know that as Japanese, I don’t have the right to say such things. Despite that, for problems between you and me, if you hate me, then I wish you can hate me because of me. I don’t want to be hated for reasons such as me being Japanese, a female or an orphan – these reasons being beyond my own control.”

Wuu, otherwise I would be very sad. But if I were to be asked, why did we start

the war, I can only say it was foolishness on my ancestor's part.

Suddenly, Lin-san let out a laugh.

… ai?!

"… that one…"

"said the same things."

"Ah?"

"In the past someone told me something similar. I only recalled that."

Waah, this is but the first time I've ever seen Lin-san smile.

"That person, is it Naru?"

"How could it. If it were Naru, he would say a single line, 'how foolish'."

If it were Naru, perhaps it would be like that.

"If it was Madoka, it would be trouble once she was made to cry."

… Aaah, I feel I somehow understand.

"—and that too, I don't actually dislike you. And I don't exceptionally hate all Japanese. It's only the inborn dislike couldn't be completely diminished."

"… yeah."

"I also think that to bring the troubles between countries into an interpersonal problem is a very foolish thing. I've said some immature words. But people always have their own personal quirks, this is something you should take note of."

"… I will try to think on that."

Lin-san smiled lightly.

"I've said some rude words, I'm sorry."

"… No. I should be the one to apologize."

What exactly we were apologizing for, I'm not too sure myself.

The world is filled with deep problems. This is such.

4

After everyone finished dinner, we had a meeting at the base. Lin-san produced the floor plan constructed from today's measurements. It was nearly touching the outer perimeter of the house. However,

"There are still blank spaces."

Naru pointed at the blue colored blanks on the diagram. Large and small, they totaled 18. The small ones were about 1 tatami's size; the large ones could be the size of a few rooms.

"Ignoring the small spaces, I'm very concerned about this large empty space."

That large blank space was at the heart of this mansion. Jutting in and out it formed an 'L' shape. Although it's size couldn't be accurately determined, from the look of the surrounding rooms it was clearly the size of a few rooms.

Naru took the floor plan for the second floor and made a comparison.

"The second floor hasn't been accurately measured, so it's better not to say anything now… it looks like there is that blank space on the second floor too."

I pulled out the floor plan made from today's measurements. Indeed, at approximately the same location on the second floor was also a large blank space. Compared to the corresponding part on the first floor, it was probably only half its size. I happened to think to compare the first and second floors' plans to the thirds, and found out that the third floor was only a part of the house. It covered almost exactly the blank area from above, so I understood that the blank area did not extend into the third floor.

"… Isn't it a hidden room? If it isn't then it's a little too large to imagine."

Bou-san said.

Indeed, if we were to think that the blank space was created as a result of it being convenient for construction, it would be overly large. The question was

how to enter it…

“Isn’t the third floor very suspicious? There’s also entry from the second floor, I think there’s the possibility of gaining access from above.”

Yasuhara spoke.

“But surrounding this blank space there are a lot of strange and weird rooms, furthermore aren’t they more complicated than at other places? Or rather the area surrounding the blank areas are strange areas.”

Just as we were talking like this and randomly comparing the diagrams, ‘knock knock’.

The majority of the members unconsciously stood up. We frantically searched for the source of the sound; it was the window facing the courtyard. A person’s face was plastered to the glass; I couldn’t help starting to get scared. It was really frightening before I understood that there was someone outside the window, and that someone was knocking on the glass.

Naru stood up.

“Madoka.”

Cough cough. Was it Mori-san?

Opening the windo, Mori-san climbed through to enter. What an energetic person.

“How’s it going?”

“Yeah. I wanted to tell you all about the results of the investigation. It’s freezing…”

“How did you come?”

“I rented a car to get nearby, and then I walked over. It’s very cold outside.”

It should be. Because the elevation here is quite high.

Wearing the jacket Naru handed her, Mori-san sat down on a chair. Rubbing her hands together for warmth, she looked like a squirrel, and appeared very pathetic.

“… Why would you do something so dangerous? What would you do if

something happened?”

“Ah lah, Naru will come to rescue me right?”

Wu. This person, is unexptectedly so incredible.

“… that.”

Naru’s face was filled with displeasure. Mori-san took out a large notebook from beneath her jacket.

“First is this morning’s incident of calling Suzuki-san’s home.”

He~, so it was all communicated.

“Buses pass regularly along the road beneath this place. And then, I tried asking the bus and car rental companies. I thought that when she left this building, which mode of public transport would she take? Although it’s not impossible to hitchhike.”

Mori-san spoke while she flipped open her notebook.

“The result of my questioning was that there didn’t appear to be any drivers who had seen or met such a person. As expected, Suzuki-san probably never left this building.”

… huh u.

“Regarding this issue, this is all I know. Then about the 2 people who disappeared in this house.”

… he~. So she’s already investigated that.

“The first to disappear was Matsunuma Eiki (松沼英树), 18 years old, unemployed. That happened on the 13th of February. He and 7 friends, 8 in total, came here at night; no news of him has been heard since. Although they came here frequently, it was the first time they did so at night. They planned a test of courage by exploring the mansion, then when they had a feast within one of the rooms, Matsunuma Eiki left the room, apparently to look for a toilet. Following that he never came back.”

Mori-san flipped over a page.

“The missing person report was made a week later. The police who heard of

this incident recruited the young people in this area to search for Matsunuga Eiki. Although they separately searched the building and its surrounds, they did not find Matsunuma-kun. Furthermore when they prepared to leave and did a head count, they realized they were missing one person. The missing one was Yoshikawa Masaya (吉川雅也), 21 years old, farmer. Everyone frantically searched the house again; not only did they not find him, because some of the people saw spirits floating through the corridors and created a ruckus, they gave up the search and went back."

While she spoke, Mori-san retrieved a few mini tapes from her pocket, and scattered them on the tabletop.

"These are recordings from witnesses. The fact is, not a hint was found in here."

"… so that's what happened."

"And then,"

Saying that, Mori-san hugged her elbows and looked at her notebook.

"Regarding the owners of this house. The one who built this house was Miyama Kaneyuki. For generations, the Miyama family was rich and powerful in Suwa (the region). Kaneyuki was the eldest son; at 16 he became the head of the Miyama family. At that time income was practically limited to that from farmers. This place is apparently the location of the Miyama family's mountain villa. When Kaneyuki was 18, he went to Europe for a tour. He returned at age 20. Apparently, after he came back he immediately changed this place into a western villa. That happened in 1877."

Mori-san flipped over a page.

"From that time onwards, up until his death from kidney disease in 1910 he always lived here. It should be said that he wasn't good with getting along with other people, because besides leaving a few times on trips, he was always closed in here. He let his wife live in the city residence, but he himself hardly every went back. And despite his dabbling in charity, overall he has never appeared to be a society man."

This was really surprising. I always thought that this Mr Kaneyuki was a great

person who treated the ones around him very well. Could it be he was unexpectedly a shy person?

“Madam,”

Bou-san spoke to Madoka-san, who had stopped for a breath.

“Don’t call me ‘Madam’. I’m not such an old fashioned person.”

“Then Miss.”

“Yes~ (heart)”

“Didn’t Mr Miyama own a hospital called ‘Miyama Benevolent Hospital’?”

Mori-san flipped through her notebook to search.

“Yes. Miyama Benevolent Hospital. Located at the edge of the city, it was an extremely large hospital.”

“What about a secured facility in the vicinity of the hospital?”

“There was one. You do know quite a bit. Patient’s family members, or recovering patients who do not stay in the hospital, and people who have recovered but have difficulty in their daily living – it was a relatively large facility which accepted these types of people.”

While she said that, a complicated expression showed on Mori-san’s face.

“There were quite a number of assistants there. Apparently it was a place with excellent service. Admission into the facility was free of charge. Meals were also free. Apparently they also distributed necessities to those they did not admit. As long as one lived in that facility, one need not worry about clothing, food or lodging.”

Oooh, how gracious.

“People who could work apparently helped with the cleaning of the Hospital, and logistics *etc.* Although half of Miyama’s fortune was lost due to the Panic of 1907, before that, this facility had already consumed a significant portion of the fortune.”

That overcoat belonged to someone at that facility. I’m afraid it was a rationed overcoat. However, why would this overcoat be at that type of place? And then,

there's the paper note with words written on it. It definitely wasn't a rich person who would wear that rationed overcoat. Yet what exactly was written on that note?

"There were also hospices and orphanages, a center for tuberculosis sufferers *etc.* In the end, in Meiji 41 (1908), Mr Miyama started giving up of various industries one by one. When Kaneyuki died, besides farmland and forests, there was practically nothing left."

Hu, this should be what they call charitable poverty. Still it's quite queer.

"Kaneyuki's eldest son was Hiroyuki. Besides giving this building various strange renovations, Hiroyuki's history is comparatively normal. I've brought the detailed histories of his and Kaneyuki's along."

Mori-san handed the notes sandwiched in her notebook to Naru.

"Tomorrow it's regarding the characters of this father and son. I feel that this needs in-depth investigation."

Mori-san said that with a school teacher's tone; Naru looked clearly unpleased.

"Madoka, this is very dangerous. It will do to make a call, don't come near this place."

Mori-san tilted her head.

"But isn't meeting face to face better?"

"In any case do not come here."

Being told off so severely by Naru, Mori-san nodded.

"Yes, yes."

Somehow it was a tone used to humor a child.

Lin-san used the car to send Mori-san back. When we were discussing this strange philanthropist, Lin-san returned through the window, and then we discussed it in greater detail. It was 11 when the meeting adjourned and we returned to our own rooms. – Then that night, Atsugi Hideo-san vanished.

5

Suddenly being woken up, I looked at my watch; it was still 3 am.

“Have you all seen Atsugi-kun?”

圣-san’s face was stark.

“… Atsugi-san?”

Who was that?

“He’s my assistant. He’s a medium.”

I tilted my head and turned towards Ayako and Masako. Both of them were also seated on their beds, with heads tilted.

“I haven’t seen him since glancing him during the exorcism. Have you guys seen him? He’s been gone for 2 hours already.”

2 hours already.

“Please wait a moment.”

I put on a sweater on top of my pajamas then I sprinted out of the room.

“Let’s go to the base.”

Bringing 圣-san along, I went to the base. Naru and Lin-san had already gathered inside the base much earlier.

“Naru, Atsugi-san, he – “

“I’ve heard it. We’re playing the recordings now.”

This time, the night vision cameras were still running. Perhaps one of the cameras might have caught Atsugi-san.

“Naru, we have it.”

This monitor was for Camera Number 4. I pulled out a floor plan from the mountainous pile of papers on the table, and confirmed the position of Camera Number 4.

“The location is?”

“The west side of the building, near the center.”

“Even if you say it out I wouldn’t know where it is.”

How long winded; in this extreme situation.

“There’re no blank spaces nearby, and there’re no strange rooms nearby either. Based on the diagram, that shouldn’t be a suspicious location.”

The monitor for Camera Number 4 showed the figure of Atsugi-san gradually moving down the corridor. The corridor where the camera was located ran east wards; the corridor at the very end ran northwards.

“That corridor is a blind alley; there are no branches.”

“Good, we will go take a look. Lin, let’s go. Mai, stay here. Bou-san and the rest will soon be here.”

“Yes, alright.”

Practically brushing by Naru etc, Bou-san, John and Yasuhara had all risen and arrived at the base.

“What about Naru-chi?”

“Gone to look for Atsugi-san.”

“Good, we will go to, John.”

Bou-san, who spoke to John, also began to leave.

“Young man, I’ll leave Mai to you.”

“I will try my utmost best.”

“Will you only try?”

“Because if Taniyama-kun goes on a stampede, there’s no one here that can stop her.”

… what?!

Really… Bou-san left smiling with that said. I glared at Yasuhara-kun who was smiling lightly.

“Who did you say will go on a stampede? Who are you calling Ohmu (tl/n: see Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind. Ohmu are tank sized cross between a caterpillar and a beetle that stampede when enraged)?”

I couldn’t help brandishing my fists.

“Aiyah, Taniyama-kun is thoughtful, mature, honest and gentle, I really like her~~”

“Are you mocking me? You’re mocking me, aren’t you?”

“That’s why I said that, right? And you don’t like it when I lie to you.”

“Yeah, that’s right… not!”

Just as I was about to lose control and beat up Yasuhara, Ayako and Masako had both gotten up and arrived at base. The four of us waited nervously; before 7, Naru and co returned. They said they couldn’t find Atsugi-san. And that corridor was clearly a blind alley.

After breakfast we had a meeting; this time the decision was to have everyone search that blind alley for secret passages. There should be a path somewhere. If that wasn’t the case then Atsugi-san’s disappearance would be incomprehensible. Knocking on the walls, and searching all the rooms – even those with furniture – thoroughly; even like this we couldn’t find the path.

As though appointed, all of the psychics had gathered at the Dining Room. Twenty people less two. Everyone looked exhausted.

“Really, what exactly is going on in this house?”

Imura-san said in a disdainful tone.

Igarashi-sensei looked towards Minami-san.

“Can’t Professor Davies do anything for us?”

圣-san looked up at once.

“Oh yes… if it’s the Professor…”

Minami-san looked obviously unhappy.

“The Professor’s clairvoyance has limited scope. I asked just now, the Professor said he couldn’t feel a thing.”

“In that case, could you please call other people here.”

Igarashi-sensei said forcefully.

“Don’t you have other friends? Won’t it do to call anyone who could help?”

“Even if you suddenly tell me so, I can’t do anything: because everyone lives overseas.”

“This is an urgent situation. If it’s you then won’t there always be a way? Or are you saying that on the first day, the things that you said about being able to get the help of Geller or Taunus was all hot air?”

Sensei’s interrogating questions were incredible. Minami-san looked angered.

“Alright. In conclusion let me make an appointment first. However, as they are all busy people, it would be very troubling to organize a time for them to come here.”

“Are you making excuses and shirking responsibility?”

It was Imura-san who spoke.

“What did you say?”

“You’re planning to say that then run away, right? Even if you say you will call them here, they will not come. Because you won’t call them at all. You don’t even know them at all, isn’t that right?”

“You’re insulting me.”

圣-san stood up and spoke.

“Please make an appointment then, Minami-san. If you’ll tell me the telephone number, I’ll make the call, shall I?”

With that said, 圣-san stood there and laughed.

“That’s great, I’ll make the call. Please tell me the telephone number. Because the one missing is my medium, it’s only polite that I make the appeal to them.”

“I can’t tell the telephone number to other people.”

“If that’s the case, you make the call, then allow me to speak. Because it’s only polite for me to make the request.”

Minami-san put on a shocking expression and stood up.

“You’re dishonoring me. This is an extreme insult. If you all are still suspicious then so be it. Regardless, I refuse to allow my busy friends to be worried over this. I think that this issue is one I can solve on my own.”

Minami-san urged the Professor, who was looking around, perplexed.

“Let’s go. I’d let it go if it were only me, but they even insulted the Professor. Really, it makes one exceedingly unhappy.”

With that parting shot, Minami-san left the Dining Room. Behind him followed his 3 assistants and the Professor.

And suspicion was left behind. A strong suspicion of Minami-san.

Can that person be trusted?

6

After the unpleasant breakfast, the psychics said they'd search through Atsugi-san's belongings while separating to exorcise the building. We returned to the base.

Bou-san hugged his head.

"This is the entrance to the blind alley. How and where should we search?"

This is what they call 'exhausting all means'. He clearly should be within this building, but there's nowhere to search.

When everyone hung their heads in deep thought, Lin-san spoke.

"Naru."

Lin-san had used the figures from our measurements and constructed a 3-D image of the mansion.

"How's it?"

"Please look at this."

The monitor showed the vertical aspect of the west side of the mansion. The stones on the wall were white; the window frames and glasses, folding doors etc were drawn with blue lines. Lin-san brought up a photo taken with an idiot-proof camera next to the diagram. He used a similar angle to view the house. Ignoring the minor details, the building in the picture and the diagram were practically the same.

"It's this part."

Lin-san pointed to the block that had stuck out from the northern side.

"Ah!"

Bou-san shouted and ran over.

“… It’s taller than the rest.”

Said Naru calmly.

Indeed, the photo and the 3D image were similar structures. That is, besides the protrusion of the roof height on the northern aspect.

In the photo, the roof at that part was slightly higher than the surroundings. However, on the computer image, the height of the roof was lower than that of the rest.

“Is it an error in measurement… or…”

Following Naru’s words, was Bou-san,

“A hidden room.”

“There’s that possibility.”

“However,” Yasuhara cut in.

“We’ve really checked that part all the way till the attics before. Look, outside the attic window, isn’t there a narrow balcony? When we were making the floor plan, even standing on that balcony, we couldn’t see the roof. Haven’t we tried that already?”

“Now that you mention it, such a thing did happen.”

Exactly. Furthermore, the one who performed this unfortunate task was John, who risked falling down too.

“If that’s the case, then it’s below.”

Naru mumbled. He asked Lin-san to bring out the floor plans.

The image on the monitor changed; the first floors’ floor plan appeared. The troublesome area was enlarged. Naru looked at it with intense concentration.

“An extremely large blind alley was built around the North block. Here and here… in total there are 8 sites where there are stairs. Up to the end of the corridor, there are 4 that ascend, and 4 that descend. We have been confused by the stairs. Count it carefully. There are more steps that ascend.”

Looking closely at the diagram, there were indeed more ascending steps.

“I’m afraid this area isn’t a 3 storey structure, but a 4 storey structure. We had planned to walk around the first floor, but without knowing we’d ended up on the second. There are rooms beneath this first floor.”

Ai~

We rushed to the North Block, and once again measured accurately the number of steps and the height of the steps.

And the conclusion was:

There were 26 ascending steps, and 18 descending. And, compared to normal staircases, each ascending step was 2cms taller, and each descending step 2cm shorter.

That is to say, in the course of ascending and descending the 8 flights of stairs in the corridor in the North Block, we had ascended approximately 4.5m, and descended a little over 2m. As the building was itself about 1m above the ground, there would be about 3m of empty space between the floor of the north block and the ground.

“What in the world is going on with this house?”

Bou-san hugged his head, and said those obvious words.

In the end, it turned out that we had to re-measure all the stairs in the house.

We frustratedly re-measured the various locations. Because there was also the possibility only some steps had different heights from others, we measured every single step. Aah, it was getting annoying.

Furthermore, to add to our troubles, upon measuring, there really were some steps that had a different height at certain parts.

Naru etc should at this point still be finding an entrance to the empty space on X level. The empty space that was the X level, and hidden rooms. 3 persons had disappeared in this mansion. If they were closed inside by someone else, and did not have any way to communicate with the outside world, they could only wait there for rescue.

Perhaps destroying this wall by force would be faster, because this might be a

matter of human life.

“Mai.”

… Yeah.

“Mai.”

… What? –Ha!

“Y… yes!”

Bou-san wore a shocked expression.

“What are you spacing out for. 16.52cm.”

“Aah, yes.”

I hurriedly entered the number onto the little black board. Although I frequently do get anxious, when I was writing on the black board, my hand slipped, and the pen was flung away.

“Oyo.”

It rolled and rolled and rolled. Chasing after the pen which rolled further away, I pathetically started running.

“I – have – caught – you.”

Pant pant. I glared at the pen I had finally picked up.

“What are you playing at?”

Bou-san shouted from the end of the corridor.

“The pen played a trick on me.”

I hurriedly ran to the corridor.

“That, how many centimeters was it?”

“16.52.”

“Yes.”

Just as I wrote the figure on the black board, Yasuhara suddenly spoke.

“Taniyama-kun, did you just chase that ball pen?”

“Yes, I’m exhausted, really~”

“All the way to the other end of the corridor?”

“… it’s exactly as you’ve seen.”

Yasuhara eyed the corridor.

“If that’s the case, could the floor of this corridor be slanting?”

“Ah.”

Bou-san and John and I shouted in unison.

I turned to the corridor. It was approximately 20m long. If it was slanting, the slope was imperceptible even when walked on.

“Don’t we have a spirit-level?”

Bou-san asked.

“I recall that we have one.”

John said.

We hurried back to base, explained the situation to Lin-san, who remained behind to take care of things, took the spirit level, and ran towards the troublesome corridor in the darkening house.

And then we measured.

The corridor that caused my ballpoint pen to roll away had a slope of around 5 degrees. According to what Yasuhara said, with a 20m corridor sloping at 5 degrees, one end of the corridor would be about 2m higher than the other.

And if all the corridors in this house were sloping?

Although I can’t imagine such a structure, I could only think that. Tomorrow we would have to place the spirit level all over the building’s floors.

7

In the end, before sunset neared, we went to measure the stairs. Step by step, we carefully measured, then recorded it faithfully on the diagram. Then, during this process, John found *that*.

That was near the center of the building, in the middle of a short flight of stairs. Along the corridor there were about 10 steps ascending. There was a room directly facing the top of this flight of stairs. From there onwards, the corridor split into slightly narrow left and right branches. Where the corridor was wider; the walls on both sides were covered with whitewash. From where I stood, up to my chest height, there was a 10cm wide protruding panel. It was engraved beautifully with a relief sculpture of creepers. Beneath that decoration…

“There’s a door here.”

John, who had squatted down to measure the height of the step, spoke. Looking closely at it, on the wall, next to where John was squatting, beneath the relief sculpture, half a door could be seen.

The door was the same color as the white wash. Due to the protrusion of the relief sculpture, it blocked our vision of this door previously.

Half of the door was covered by the stairs. Even like this, from a higher position, a small door handle could be seen. John grabbed this handle and pushed. The door opened easily inwards.

I shone the torch into the dark room.

That was a narrow room about 3 tatami’s size. The floor was covered with dust; there wasn’t a thing that looked like furniture. Although there was a window on the inside, no light shone through it. It was clearly sealed from the outside.

John jumped into that room. The dust was all stirred up; John coughed a few times gently.

“Is there anything inside?”

Although Bou-san spoke to John like that, the room was just like what we saw with our first brief sweep with the torch: besides the dust, there was nothing. No.

“There’s a frame hung on the wall.”

We stretched our necks to see the large frame pointed out by John.

“Besides that, there isn’t anything else, is there?”

“No.”

John removed the frame and passed it back out of the room. I took the dust covered frame, then Bou-san and Yasuhara pulled John up from the room.

There, I carefully rubbed the dust on the frame. It looked like a portrait.

After rubbing the dust even more carefully, the canvas became uneven, and the remnants of an oil painting appeared. A male was drawn on it: a frail, shrewd looking man of about 40. His hair was neatly combed, and he wore a black overcoat over his black kimono.

“There’s a signature here.”

Bou-san pointed to the bottom left corner of the portrait. Sloping yellow lines were written there. Rather than calling them lines, they should be called patterns made from lines. As for what was written above, we all couldn’t see clearly.

“… this is the Kaō.”

“Kaō?”

“Aah, a Japanese style signature. It’s a stylized method of writing Kanji *etc.* … I really can’t see a thing on this one.”

Bou-san tilted the frame. He turned the portrait around to look at its back.

“There’s something written here.”

On the frame was a row of black words written vertically.

“March, Meiji 32. Self Portrait. 浦户(Urado)”

These words were written in neat calligraphy.

“March, Meiji 32. Self Portrait. Urado. Is it?”

Bou-san looked a few times at the signature on the right side.

“No wonder. This word looks like the word ‘浦’ (Ura).”

That is to say the Kaō was designed from the character ‘浦’.

Yasuhara thought for a moment.

“That’s really strange. Normally aren’t signatures made from first names? ‘俊树(Toshioki?)’ and what not. This is a surname, right?”

“There’s that too.”

It was Urado-san’s self portrait. But who was this person called Urado?

Yasuhara also thought the same things as I did, “If the self portrait of this person is here as decoration, this Urado person should be a relative of Mr Miyama.”

“Was he an artist of relative fame?”

Yeah~, but I’ve never heard the name ‘Urado’.

“It’d be better to ask Ohashi-san about this one.”

Bou-san returned the portrait to its frame as he said that. Then, he patted John’s shoulder.

“Come, John. Let’s go measure this room.”

… Thank you guys.

The two of them carried tape measures, crawled into that narrow room and measured the dimensions and direction of the room. Then they started measuring if the floor was sloping or not, and what height the floor was from the staircase.

While they were measuring, I looked once more at that picture. Mr “Urado” somehow looked like a cold person. He had a thin face, sunken eyes, a mouth

that was closed into a straight line, and a long and narrow nose; perhaps it was this external appearance that gave me that impression.

When we returned to base, the sun had long set; hence we were severely scolded by Naru. He said, didn't he tell us to return before dusk *etc.* Whatever~, we were clearly working desperately. He's really such a grouse.

Only when I quietly asked Ayako, did I find out that no one had found the entry to the X level yet. That was why his mood was so bad. This person is really headstrong.

Regardless, we still told Naru etc about John finding a hidden room. After I showed the frame in question to Naru, his attitude changed slightly.

"March, Meiji 32, Self Portrait, Urado."

Naru repeated.

"The signature… Ura."

Naru suddenly raised his head. He searched the tabletop and pulled out an envelope. He pulled out the paper money from the envelope.

"What's up?"

"It is '浦Ura'."

Naru let the light shine through the note.

… ah. There was indeed the word '浦Ura' written on the note.

Naru handed the note to me. I looked at the note with light shining through it. Bou-san's head also moved closer.

Amidst the overlapping blotches were words written with a fountain pen or something. Near the center was the word '浦Ura'. After looking at the words nearby…

"Isn't this '户(do?)', next to it?"

"It's true. This is '户'."

… Urado.

So that's what it was. Bou-san picked up the envelope on the table as he

spoke. The characters we had seen yesterday were written on it.

‘吧(ba) 走(walk) 了(already) 浦(Ura) 被(by) 听(hear) 死(die) 都(all) 这(this) 来(come)’

Bou-san wrote the word ‘户’ next to the word ‘浦’.

‘吧(ba) 走(walk) 了(already) 浦户(Urado) 被(by) 听(hear) 死(die) 都(all) 这(this) 来(come)’

“Why are these words written…? ‘被(by) 听(hear)’… this is ‘被 听(listened by)’ right? ‘浦户(Urado)’ ‘死(die)’ ‘都(all) 这(this) 来(come)’… ‘来这里的都 (all who came to this place)’…?”

“What type of speech is this considered?”

“Exactly.”

Bou-san and I let out a sigh.

“And I was still thinking there could be some clue.”

At this time, Yasuhara spoke.

“Wait a moment. This is wrong. ‘户(do)’ is on the left side.”

“Ai?”

Yasuahara took the envelope, rubbed off Bou-san’s words, then rewrote the word: “吧(ba) 走(walk) 了(already) 户浦(do-ura?) 被(by) 听(hear) 死(die) 都(all) 这(this) 来(come)”

“户浦(do-ura?)?”

Everyone tilted their heads.

“I’ve got it!”

Yasuhara snapped his fingers.

“This is read from right to left.”

… Ai?

Bou-san also agreed.

“It’s like this. If you think about it from the perspective of the era when these

words were written, it’s actually more natural this way.”

Yasuhara rewrote the words on the note.

“来(come) 这(this) 都(all) 死(die) 听(hear) 被(by) 浦户(Urado) 了(already) 走(walk) 吧(ba)”

We looked at the note with light shining through it several more times.

“This and this are joined together… between these two words there is a word…”

We mumbled to ourselves while we rewrote the words beneath it again.

“来(Come)? 这里(This place)? 全都死了(Have all died) 听说是被浦户(heard it was Urado who)?? 的(particle)? 走吧(go)”

“How is it?”

We took turns reading the paper passed around by Yasuhara.

Wuu, even if it’s like this, we still don’t understand anything.

“The first sentence should be comprehensible.”

Yasuhara mumbled. Bou-san spoke with a stiff voice.

“I think it’s comprehensible too.”

Ai?

“Isn’t this ‘come to this place… have all died’?”

“Ah!”

“Perhaps it refers to the people who came to this place. But it’s not too clear if there are 2 or 3 words in the space in between.”

The people who came to this place have all died…

“If that’s the case then the last sentence should be simple.”

Ayako said with extreme displeasure.

“This is a message left for a certain person. ‘The people who came to this place have all died. … run away’…”

(tl/n: this incomplete is actually ridiculously difficult to translate, since the

word order used in Chinese is different from English.

The sentence in Chinese with the missing words replaced by a question mark goes: 来? 这里? 全都死了。听说是被浦户?? 的。? 走吧。

If I take the liberty of filling in the missing words, I can get: 来到这里的全都死了。听说是被浦户杀 的。逃走吧。

Translating that to English:

Those who c*a*me to this place have all died. Heard they were *killed* by Urado. *Run* away.)

8

A warning. A message left. Who wanted to communicate this, and to whom? The owner of that overcoat must have wanted to pass this message to someone. It's also possible it was something received from someone else.

When everyone was deep in thought, someone lightly tapped the window.

When everyone turned to look at the window, Mori-san was already standing there.

"Madoka! … Haven't I already told you how dangerous this is, and not to come near to this place?"

Opening the window, Naru spoke in a cool voice.

Mori-san raised her hand.

"Stop. How about letting me in first?"

Naru pulled Mori-san in with an extremely displeased expression. Mori-san, who jumped in with a thump, said, "Greetings to everyone", and smiled.

"Madoka. I should have already told you not to come."

"Ah la, of course it's because there's no danger that I'm here. I'm not as stupid as Naru."

… Stupid. And that referred to Naru. She really has guts.

Mori-san, who had sat down, took out a few cans of coffee from a convenience store bag and distributed it to us.

"… and then?"

While Naru's cold gaze observed these, Mori-san, who had loosened the tab on the can, passed the can towards Naru.

"Help me open it (heart)."

Stiff-faced, Naru pulled open the can. After passing the can back to Mori-san, “Why is there no danger?”

Mori-san did not hesitate at all.

“This is a child’s playground.”

“… What do you mean?”

“I say, isn’t the front garden of this house a large field? It looks like the children all come here to play.”

She said that and flashed a smile.

“Apparently that place was suitable for the neighborhood children to practice baseball or soccer, so that location was often used. It looks like because of the disappearance incident around February that those activities ceased. Of course, there hasn’t been any incident of a child disappearing. That’s why I said that there’s no danger up to the gardens.”

Mori-san shrugged as she said that.

“Apparently they’ve always forbidden children from entering the house. This place is also a famous haunted house, so although incidents of children secretly entering the house out of curiosity have happened before, no one had gone into the depths of the house. At the most they took a turn around the room by the window, and then stopped their activities just like that.”

Mori-san stared at Naru with a challenging look.

“That’s why I said, the dangerous part is the inside of this house. The outside of the house is safe.”

“That’s only for the day time right?”

“Ah la, one will inevitably tangle with a little danger in the work of a ghost hunter. I haven’t done anything more dangerous than living in a house with a bad record.”

… well said.

“… and then?”

“You aren’t here just to see our faces, are you?”

“Ah, right, right.”

Mori-san clapped her hands and retrieved a notebook from her sweater pocket.

“That… Atsugi-san hasn’t been sighted nearby too. He hasn’t taken a bus or rented a car either.”

Mori-san said that while she turned a page.

“And about the Miyama father and son situation. First up is Mr Kaneyuki.”

Naru’s cold gaze somehow makes one feel that he isn’t listening at all.

“He was apparently severely mysophobic. It was said that there was a dishonest incident at the silk factory. Apparently one of the staff misappropriated the wages of a worker or something. Then, that worker was dismissed for no good reason. His eldest son was also working in the same factory and was also sacked. His third son was a staff member of the hospital, and was also sacked. And the owner of the house they lived in was Kaneyuki, so they were all evicted. – it doesn’t stop here.”

“There’s more?”

Bou-san was shocked speechless. Mori-san nodded, smiling.

“There is. His married daughter and her husband also rented their house from Kaneyuki, so they were also evicted. The convict’s parents were also Kaneyuki’s tenant farmers, and were also evicted.”

“That’s really despicable…”

“Isn’t it? This is turning into a theme here.”

Saying that, Mori-san flipped over a page.

“Therefore, Mr Kaneyuki really disliked interacting with people, and completely did not allow anyone to come near this mountain villa. Apparently even if there was an urgent matter he would also be unreachable. Unless Mr Kaneyuki contacted the outside, there would be practically no way otherwise.”

… He~~.

“Apparently he had employed a maid, but it’s said that she wasn’t employed

from Suwa but from somewhere else; it was something like that. The son, Mr Hiroyuki, was also a famous eccentric. However one puts it he is the person who renovated this building endlessly. Regarding the renovations, Mr Hiroyuki had said some words that made others concerned…”

“Words that made others concerned?”

“Yeah. When he was asked about the reason for the renovations, apparently he said: ‘Because there are spirits escaping; this is to make sure they don’t escape.’.”

… Because there are spirits escaping, this is to make sure they don’t escape…

“That’s all I’ve found out.”

With a clap, Mori-san closed the notebook. She tilted her head as though very troubled.

“However we put this, these events are of days long past, and there are already very few people who remember these incidents. Because of the era, I think it is already very good that I’ve found out this much.”

Naru did not speak. A ‘thank you’ would have been good at least.

Bou-san cut in.

“Miss, do you know of Kaneyuki’s friends?”

“I’ve investigated it a little… But I’ve heard he practically has no one he would call a friend.”

“I’m afraid there should be a person called Urado amongst them.”

Bou-san picked up the frame which was sitting in a corner of the room.

“The person in this painting. According to the date on the back as to when this was painted, this should be somebody Mr Kaneyuki knew…”

Bou-san’s words had not reached the end. Mori-san glanced at that painting, “Ah la, that is Mr Kaneyuki.”

And said that.

“Was Mr Kaneyuki’s pseudonym Urado?”

Bou-san looked repeatedly through the photocopies of the photos Mori-san had left behind.

It was a photo of a person standing beside a door post hung with a plaque, ‘Miyama Weaving Factory’. Regardless of how one looked at it, one could see the model for the self-portrait was definitely Mr Kaneyuki.

“Although he’s a philanthropist, he’s also an eccentric – this man.”

“Exactly.”

Naru’s expression turned a little severe.

“He’s only an eccentric. ‘The people who came to this place have all died’. ‘This place’ would definitely have to be this mountain villa, right? What happened here? ‘Heard they were ?? by Urado’ – If we don’t know the meaning of that sentence we can’t figure it out.”

Somehow Naru’s tone of voice was strangely unsettling.

“But one thing is clear for sure.”

Ayako said.

“What…?”

I asked.

“Ah la, have you forgotten already? It’s what the spirits said during the séance.”

… Ah.

“‘Save me’ ‘I don’t want to die’ – Those were definitely the spirits of the people who died here.”

Ayako’s words made me feel even more uneasy.

Cloaked in uneasiness that night, I returned to my room.

– Then I had a dream.

9

Even I didn’t know why I woke up.

I woke up suddenly in the middle of the night. Just as I thought, ‘Oh dear’, I realized my arms and legs were stiff and could not move. Naru told me that being physically unable to move is not a psychic phenomenon but a physiological occurrence. When the body is very tired but the mind very excited, such things would happen.

So it’s only that my body cannot move, I thought; I was actually very calm. As though nothing was wrong, I looked around and confirmed that Ayako and Masako were both fast asleep. After confirming that, I thought to myself that this time, my head was large. (tl/n:eh… cross-check this please)(anon: if you got this from a Chinese raw, then it probably means "I have a big problem / difficult problem" But I don't see how it fits here). My head could move. It’s very normal to discover one’s body is completely unable to move after dozing off.

My back rapidly turned cold. I wanted to call Ayako and Masako. Of course, I could not make a sound. At the very least it’d have been good to have been able to make some vague or muffled call; as that thought passed through my head even breathing started becoming difficult. Cold sweat covered me from head to toe; I felt dizzy and disorientated. Inside I told myself, calm down, calm down; I started chanting the incantation.

Naumakusanmandabazaradankan, naumakusanmandabazaradankan…

My body suddenly turned light. When I slowly relaxed my body, a soft sound came from the outside; the room’s door opened.

My body still could not move as I wished. Only my head turned towards the door. Black figures entered the room.

Due to the abruptness of the situation I was slightly stunned. Because they were unquestionably human figures. There were 2 of them. Those 2 figures

quietly approached me.

Who was it? Just as I thought that, I recalled that I had locked the door before going to sleep. Because Naru had nagged many times about being more careful, that I should lock the door properly.

… Why can they open the door?

The figures stood on my two sides. In the darkness, I could vaguely see their faces. Male. They were 2 complete strangers. At once, in my mind appeared the thought that they were robbers or nymphomaniacs. As I was desperately calling out to Ayako and Masako silently, those 2 men grabbed my arms.

“What are you doing?!”

I shouted in my heart, but I could not make a sound. Grabbing both my arms, I was pulled into sitting position. My body could move. However, it wouldn’t move according to my wishes. I wanted to resist but could not. I couldn’t even move a finger as I pleased. It was clearly my body but it was controlled by someone else.

I was dragged into standing position; my 2 arms were held separately by the 2 men as they walked. Horror and fear rose within me as I was dragged out of the room.

It was pitch-black outside the room. The corridors clearly should not have any electrical lighting. I was dragged down the corridor where I could not tell left from right due to the darkness. After walking a long distance, the men opened a door.

I didn’t know which room this was. It was a relatively spacious room. I’m not sure where the light came from; there was a magical glow as though being under a full moon. The furniture in the room was arranged neatly. In any case it looked like very expensive furniture; it really made one feel that there was someone living here. However, there was no one in the room.

The men dragged me into the room. They silently brought me in front of a closet on the right. After opening the closet, there was a corridor inside. The long, dark, narrow corridor extended endlessly inwards. Its narrowness and darkness was somehow nauseating. I desperately thought of struggling free of their hands; of course, I still could not make a sound.

My arms were grabbed and pulled inwards. Gradually, the corridor became a long narrow gravel path sandwiched by hedgerows.

Step by step I walked on the gravel path; I lifted my head and looked at the 2 men on both sides. The surroundings were clearly very bright but I could not see their faces. No, although I could actually see their faces, I could not understand what they actually looked like.

… This is a dream.

That's right; if this isn't a dream such a thing wouldn't be possible.

I lifted my head and looked at the hedge rows on both sides. Those hedgerows were made very tall; they extended upwards far above my head.

If this is a dream then I should collect information properly. I made this resolution, but somehow felt strange.

Following the hedgerows twisting and turning we walked forwards. The path once again gradually turned into a corridor. A faint scent of blood wafted through the air. That wasn't all. The stench of something rotting also permeated the air.

There was a door in a jutting out portion of the corridor. I cringed silently. I don't want to go inside. I could feel there was a hateful smell inside. I felt it diffused from the door.

The men opened the door. Inside there, too, was a spacious room.

This room should be the main hall. In the spacious room there was a staircase and countless doors. Suddenly I smelt a strong scent of blood. I was dragged up the stairs, and inwards the distance of about 3 doors, and brought into the innermost room.

That room looked like a bathroom of sorts. It was a small room laid with white tiles. On the wooden planked floor, the 2 men let go of my arms, then suddenly started taking off my clothes.

Stop!

I shouted out loud in my heart. I realized that the clothes I was wearing had somehow turned into a kimono. It was a dark blue kimono. Yes, this is a dream.

Although that was what I thought, to have someone else strip one's clothing like that is definitely an uncomfortable experience. After I was stripped naked, I was brought into a deeper room.

That was a room about 12 tatami's size. Like the small room, it was covered with white tiles. In the middle of the room, there was a bathtub that was as white as the walls. It was like those seen in foreign films; an antique bathtub placed on the floor.

Then, a red colored substance flowed on the floor.

An overwhelming smell of blood and a sharp stench of decomposition made me unable to breathe. I forcefully held back my nausea. My feet stepped on a lukewarm fluid. Stepping on that sticky substance I trembled with fear. A whole face of that wide room was stained red. With much difficulty, I stepped once more onto the white tiles; a red foot print remained on the tile. Looking closely, I could see there were some white fluffy things in the blood. It looked like minced pieces of meat.

… No.

Even if this was a dream, it was disgusting enough to make me vomit. I looked towards the inside of the bathtub; inside there were some red things. After the red fluid dripped onto the floor, long blood stains detailed the white shiny porcelain surface.

I don't want to dream this type of dream.

The men took me into the depth of the room. There was a small bed. It was just like the metal beds used in the hospital. Tiles covered the place where there should have been a mattress. Both the metal and the tiles had turned mushy because of the red substance.

"… No."

I could make a sound. I was pulled backwards.

I don't want to sleep on that type of place. What is that large basin placed directly beneath the bed? What is the deep bucket like container placed by the leg of the bed? Why are there tiles laid on a bed? Why are there ropes tied to the metal posts of the bed? Why is this place so dirty?

The men forcefully dragged me onto the bed. I screamed and started to resist. I desperately bit the 2 hands grabbing me, but I was still forcefully pulled onto those tiles. After being pulled onto those tiles, my back felt the cold, slippery sensation of the tiles. The disgusting sensation of slippery, lukewarm blood and the soft fragment of something unknown – it was almost like slabs of meat or something – against my back caused a sensation of horror.

"No!"

I wanted to escape and tried to move my body, but the blood in my body had apparently solidified. As though my whole body was drenched in blood, an overwhelming stench surrounded me.

They placed me in the opposite direction of the bed, with my head going where the feet usually go, then pressed me down with a force that made my bones and joints groan.

"No! Let me go!"

This is a dream…

They pulled my hands as though trying to break it then tied my hands to the metal post with rope.

This situation is only a dream.

Both my legs were also secured.

"No! Save me!"

A coarse rope went around my chest, and my upper body was also tied down. It had turned into a position with my throat facing backwards, and my head dangling off the end of the bed.

Crap. This type of position is very frightening. Even desperately twisting my body, I could not budge. The men left. I was abandoned there, tied securely to the bed, maintaining a posture with my head dangled backwards. I felt the blood which had solidified in my body rush to my head due to gravity.

Calm down. This is only a dream. This is definitely a dream. Because such a thing could not possibly happen. I will wake up shortly. I will definitely wake up. Then, I thought, Ah I'm dreaming.

Despite thinking like this my teeth were still chattering. I opened my closed eyes; I was stunned.

– White light.

What is that thing that looks like a huge vegetable cleaver?

What are they going to use that thing for? What do they want to do with me?

Save me

One of the men stood by my side; the other stood besides my face. The man beside my face grabbed my hair. He pushed down forcefully; as though convulsing, my neck bent backwards.

I was already unable to speak. I told myself, this is a dream – therefore nothing will happen. Such horrible things will no longer happen. It will definitely be OK.

I was unable to close my eyes or move my body. I could only shiver there and look on blankly at the things passing in front of my eyes.

Save me

White porcelain. Red fluid spurted onto the ceiling. It was in the shape of a blotch.

Suddenly that man let go of my hair. The man straightened slightly.

Look, it's all right. As expected nothing horrible will happen. Because this is a dream.

I sensed the man bending his waist to check the position of the bucket. The gleam of the knife he held in his hand flashed across my eyes.

I want to wake up already. I don't want to remain in this place anymore.

The man looked up.

It's all right, nothing so horrible will happen again. This fellow will leave this place. Definitely.

The man reached out and grabbed my hair. He used a force as though attempting to break my neck to pull me into a posture where my neck was exposed. – Once again.

No

White light flashed across my eyes.

I don’t want to die.

The man reached out.

Save me

Ice cold fingers touched my exposed throat.

I don’t want to die

The man lifted his hands. An ice-cold item pressed against my throat. It was a thin, sharp item.

This man will definitely maintain this position and not move. He will leave this place like this. Otherwise time will definitely stop. Someone will definitely save me. I will definitely wake up. Definitely.

I was terrified. I didn’t want to look. I wanted to shut my eyes but was unable. I stared at the tiled walls in my stiff body.

The man’s hands started moving.

Why aren’t I waking up?! Please, hurry and wake up!

I sensed the thin, ice-cold item sliding on my throat. A biting pain washed through my entire body.

At once a warm wet substance rushed forth from my throat and down my neck. My vision was stained bright red. Finally I sensed the pain of my neck being cut; I used all the strength I had to call out loudly.

Save me! I don’t want to be killed!!

Chapter 4: Coming from direction of the clapping sound

1

“Mai!”

Ayako’s made a sharp sound and clapped my face.

“Mai!”

It was Ayako’s voice. I opened my eyes at once. Ayako’s face jumped into my field of vision, which had been flooded by tears.

At that time, I was screaming. I was screaming from the depths of my body. Although my throat was hoarse and I couldn’t properly make a sound, I actually wanted to scream – until I had expelled all the horror within my body.

“Mai! Pull yourself together! Mai!”

My body was twitching, convulsing. I only desperately hugged Ayako tightly. Ayako’s warm hands desperately soothed my back.

“Pull youself together. It’s only a dream, it’s all right.”

Urging me, come, I lifted my head. Someone held a glass in front of me.

“Do you want a drink?”

It was Masako’s extremely concerned face. I finally calmed down and accepted the cup. My hands were still trembling immensely; almost enough to spill all the contents of the cup.

“… yeah. Thank you.”

My voice was also shaking. Tears dropped pitter patter down.

“What in the world happened?”

“I had a frightening dream.”

Really, it was terrifying…

“The dream you had was…”

Just as Ayako was asking, someone pounded heavily on the door.

“Did someone scream here just now?”

It was Bou-san and co who had rushed over from their room.

“… I’m sorry. I had a nightmare.”

“… You said you had a nightmare… you…”

Green in the face, Bou-san knelt by the bed. Yasuhara and John also heaved a sigh of relief.

Bou-san buried his head in the blankets.

“… Don’t scare us anymore.”

“I’m sorry.”

Yasuhara forced a stiff smile.

“And we thought something had happened to someone… thank god.”

John also smiled vacantly.

“That’s great.”

Bou-san suddenly lifted his head.

“You said you had a nightmare; could it be those dreams?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“How was it?”

I didn’t want to remember. Even just thinking of recalling it brought a fresh scent of blood.

“You’re a woman with a sixth sense right?”

“—I was killed in the dream.”

Everyone stared at my face.

“You said you were killed, that is…”

Ayako, who was seated next to me, looked at my face.

“There were 2 men who came. They dragged me into a strange, tiled room. There, there was a surgical bed like bed; the room was flooded with blood. They slit my throat there.”

I still clearly remembered the sensation of blood spurting out.

“I think there are also many others who died there. It was an execution ground – that place.”

When I related that, tears flooded my eyes once more.

I thought I would really die there. Really, it was terrifying.

Ayako patted my back. I couldn’t stop my tears from gushed forth.

After a bout of crying like an idiot, when I lifted my head I saw Lin-san standing at the open door. Naru wasn’t there.

Why wasn’t he there?

Why wasn’t he there at that time?

Regardless of the time, Naru would always appear in my dreams; he’d tell me all sorts of things, and would give me help. Regardless, he would smile gently at me. It should clearly have been like this; why?

… Because he’s very cold. Because he really is a cold person.

Without knowing, my imagination ran wild, and once more my tears started falling down. I hurriedly hung my head, and desperately covered my face. Now isn’t the time to cry. Everyone is worried about me.

Someone – I don’t know who – knocked my head (I think it should be Bou-san who would do something like that). Anyway I nodded first. I’m all right. I’ve already calmed down.

Suddenly the scent of red tea wafted in. Hearing the sound of cutlery clattering, I lifted my head. Someone held a teacup in front of me. I was stunned.

“You’re all right?”

A voice without inflexion. Lifting my head, Naru was holding the cup out to me. He was wearing a pair of thin, grey, pajamas. I felt it was a rare sight, and I unconsciously calmed down.

I gently accepted the cup. Yeah, I’m all right. My hands, too, had apparently stopped shaking.

“I’m sorry, everyone. Thanks.”

I took the cup and hung my head. Ayako gently patted my back.

Naru just stood by the side; then gently let out a breath. And then “What happened?”

He asked.

After I quietly finished my piece, Yasuhara spoke in a low tone.

“Suzuki-san or Atsugi-san… perhaps they are already dead.”

“Hey hey, young man. Don’t say that so lightly.”

Bou-san glared.

“Because, hasn’t Taniyama-kun seen it? Perhaps it’s something that happened somewhere.”

Ai?

“You’re also saying… Mai and someone’s spirit synchronized; that is, she’s received a telepathic communication?”

“The professional stuff I don’t know too well. The one being killed in reality was Suzuki-san or Atsugi-san; Taniyama-kun has sensed the events that happened to Atsugi-san as though experiencing it herself; there should be this sort of possibility too. Despite saying all this, I’m not sure whether such a thing exists.”

Bou-san looked at Naru, who was seated next to Ayako on the bed, appealingly. Naru said meaningfully, “This type of communication from spirits is not unprecedented. But does Mai have this degree of power?”

… Wu. What does that count as *, this theory*.

“Compared to this, that room is a greater concern to me.”

Naru said while his black eyes glanced at the sky.

“I think there isn’t a room that matches the execution room. I don’t recall seeing a room with both a furnace and a closet. The existence of the so called hedgerows is also unclear. If such a room really exists; under those circumstances, the execution room has probably been completely renovated already.”

Mentioning that, I was wearing a kimono at that time…

“Regardless of how we speculate, the empty space in the floor plan is very worrisome.”

“Isn’t hacking through the walls the only way?”

I couldn’t stop myself from saying that. Bou-san let out a huge sigh.

“What are you thinking of, you madam. Who do you propose do the work of hacking through the wall?”

… Of course that’d be Lin-san and Bou-san and John and Yasuhara…

Yeah, in normal circumstances it’d probably be annoying~

Without talking about whether Ohashi-san would allow it, we do not have sufficient manpower either. If we hired people to work here, it’d be intolerable if somebody disappears again.

That’s what I thought.

“That thought isn’t bad.”

Weary, Naru said that line.

“Hey, don’t joke anymore. Are you going to have all those walls demolished?”

Accompanying Bou-san’s shout, an unsettling smile appeared on Naru’s face.

“If we can’t find the hidden entrance, this might be unavoidable. Anyway we shall begin after the night is over.”

“And the search for the missing persons?”

“They aren’t within the range of what our eyes can see. If it’s like this, they are definitely in a place where our eyes are unable to see. If the hidden room is found then the problem is naturally solved – such a possibility also exists.”

He’s right too.

Bou-san glared at me with a gimlet stare.

I’m so sorry. But, it’s because we are doing good works. Try your best.

It was 2 am when I had screamed. After that I dozed a little, and rose with the dawn. After washing up I went for breakfast. Despite saying that, I couldn’t work up an appetite even this morning. Then we gathered at the base. Lin-san was checking the equipment. Speaking of which, last night, the equipment registered no disturbance at all.

Anyway we resumed the accurate measuring of the 2 floors left over from yesterday.

“If this still doesn’t work then find out about whether we can knock holes in the walls.”

With Naru’s cruel words, we started work.

2

“Hey~, Mai.”

“Yeah?”

I positioned the fluid level on the ground, while turning to look at Bou-san.

“You met 2 men in your dream; do you know who they are?”

“Ah, that. Although I desperately looked at their faces, I didn’t make the least impression of their appearances. It somehow feels like it’s something that I’ve forgotten immediately after seeing it. When I looked, I knew, but I’m not clear about how they actually looked like.”

Bou-san squatted down beside me.

“Hey, I’m only saying this here.”

“Yeah.”

Because the volume of our conversation had diminished, Yasuhara and John came nearer.

“That… do you think that those 2 men are amongst the staff here?”

“Ai?!”

Bou-san placed his finger on his lips with a ‘Shh’.

“I thought, could it possibly be that the fellows here have sone something.”

Ai ai ai…

Yasuhara, who was also squatting down, leaned forward.

“Ah, isn’t this scene like those in a movie?”

“Is it?”

“They clearly know there are hidden rooms and hidden passageways but they

don’t tell us; there’s this possibility too.”

“Exactly. It’s those fellows who hid the 2 people who have disappeared. If it’s like this…”

Bou-san put his hand on his head.

Yasuhara couldn’t stop nodding.

“If it’s like this then we’re all sacrifices. They told us that it’d be troubling to let the media know, and they closed us in here, then one by one they make us vanish. In the end there’s not one of us left…”

“The one called Ohashi is actually a homicidal maniac or something.”

“Perhaps this place is a secret temple for satanic worship.”

John, who was also squatting, held his head.

“Those fellows – didn’t they say that they had not encountered anything strange? They were here preparing for a very long time, right? They say nothing had happened; is it even possible?”

“Exactly. None of the staff here have disappeared before. Thinking carefully about it, none of the people directly associated with this house have vanished. But psychics, the punk who broke into this place, and the fire brigade volunteer who came forth to investigate…”

“Isn’t that so?”

I couldn’t help looking at their 2 faces.

“Hey, are you two really speaking seriously?”

“Ai?”

“No… that…”

“I think that lazing off here and talking about these pointless things won’t solve any problems.”

Bou-san’s and Yasuhara’s faces turned aside.

“Furthermore, Naru will not accept this sort of thing either. In any case we have no choice but to place fluid levels on all the floors. In the end we will have

to knock down the wall, right?”

“Mai.”

“Wh~at?”

“You are really not the least bit cute.”

“That’s redundant.”

Hn.

Just at that time,

“Wait a moment.”

John wore a severe expression and gently raised his hand.

“What’s up?”

“What Yasuhara-kun said just now: none of the people associated with this family had disappeared; this line.”

“Wait, John. That was only a joke. You can’t be serious.”

John’s blue eyes gazed at me.

“But, this is a fact, isn’t it?”

“The fact you’re talking about is…”

“Mr Kaneyuki, who lived here, was fine. Mr Hiroyuki, who frequently stopped at this place, was also fine. Even the various staff members, up till today, have lived safely here.”

“Hey hey, John.”

Bou-san responded in a shocked tone. In contrast, John looked completely serious.

“The ones who vanished are all outsiders. Is this really meaningless?”

“You… could you possibly be thinking that the people here are the criminals…?”

John shook his head.

“That’s not what I mean. I’m just thinking whether there could be a

connection.”

Connection…

“Atsugi-san disappeared in a very strange fashion. If it is the same as what was recorded he couldn’t have disappeared. Is this, as expected, the actions of spirits?”

“… Perhaps.”

“If that’s the case, then don’t the spirits here have the hobby of picking out sacrifices? The spirits here will not hurt anyone with an association to the Miyama family or something.”

Bou-san sank into deep thought.

“However, the staff here are, at most, servants; they don’t have any blood relation.”

“If that’s the case, perhaps the spirits here like young people.”

… Ai?

“Aren’t all the staff here older people? In contrast, aren’t all those who have vanished young persons around 20 years old?”

“… you are right.”

Bou-san nodded.

I stood up.

“I’m going to tell Naru.”

“Wait.”

Bou-san called me.

“All the members of our team are under 30. If John’s hypothesis is right, then aren’t all of us in grave danger?”

… really?

“Naru-chan is right. It’s better if one is definitely not alone.”

3

When the four of us returned to base, Naru, Lin-san, Ayako and Masako had returned. For some reason they wore tense expressions.

“What’s up?”

I opened my mouth to ask; Ayako turned to look at me with a solemn expression.

“Great, you guys are back. – Someone has disappeared again.”

Disappeared?! Again?!

“Who is it?!”

Bou-san asked.

“She’s called Fukuda-san.”

“How old is she?”

The significance of Bou-san’s question was perhaps only understood by the people from the Mansion Interior Exploration Team.

Ayako was also slightly stunned.

“Her exact age isn’t clear. 25, perhaps; about that old.”

“She is the girl from Minami Psychic Research right? Is she that young lady?”

“Yes…”

As expected…

Naru wore a shocked expression.

“And then?”

Bou-san told everyone what John had said; Naru sank into deep thought.

“So that’s how it is…”

Naru mumbled, and then he raised his head and turned towards Yasuhara and me.

“The two of you must never be on your own.”

… Yeah.

Then he turned towards Ayako.

“Matsuzaki-san, to what extent can I trust on you?”

“What the heck is this question of yours?”

“Now isn’t the time for arguments. Whether it is Mai or Yasuhara, right now we need the two of them. However, this place is very dangerous. To what extent can I rely on you?”

Ayako replied very resentfully.

“If it’s exorcism… you can count on me for something of this level.”

“Understood.”

Naru looked around at us.

“Matsuzaki-san and Hara-san must never act separately. Can the two of you cooperate with each other?”

“I think so…”

Ayako nodded; Masako asserted:

“If it’s Matsuzaki-san, I don’t feel comfortable.”

“What is the meaning of this?!”

Naru gently raised a hand towards Ayako, then gazed at Masako with his deep eyes.

“Hara-san. Basically I don’t trust anyone besides the members here. Reliable people are few and far between. However one puts it you are also a psychic; if this is the case then you should at least be able to protect yourself.”

“… Yeah.”

“Yasuhara-kun completely does not have any ability to protect himself. To protect him we need an extremely reliable person.”

“Yes…”

Seeing Masako nod, Naru spoke.

“Bou-san and John cannot leave Yasuhara-kun’s side. You must never let him out of your sight.”

The so called extremely reliable person, refers to the two of them…?

“Please wait a moment.”

Lin-san spoke loudly.

“Are you saying I am to protect Taniyama-san?”

“Exactly.”

“Just let me put this clearly. You aren’t even able to do exorcisms, are you?”

… That’s right too. Naru is purely metapsychology researcher.

“Then your position is practically identical to that of Yasuhara-kun. You need protection.”

“Lin, I’ll find a way.”

“I’m not joking. I’ll be very worried if you say it like this. Let me take care of Naru’s protection.”

After finishing that forcefully, Lin-san looked towards us.

“Takigawa-san will protect Yasuhara-kun. Taniyama-san will then depend on Brown-san.”

“It’s too much for Bou-san alone.”

“Hey hey, Naru-chan.”

“I’m not belittling you. I’m only saying that there’s the possibility that this place is dangerous to this type of level.”

“If that’s the case, then it’ll be solved if one person goes back. I’m not capable of letting Naru be alone. If something happens to you, how should I explain to the Professor?”

Professor?

“Please consider the feelings of your parents too.”

“Lin.”

“You haven’t forgotten the fact you are only a 17 year old child, have you?”

Naru glared at Lin-san solemnly.

“If you’re dissatisfied with me, you may go back.”

“Please don’t misunderstand. Of course, I can go back.”

Lin-san’s expression turned even more solemn.

“I’ll be very worried if you’ve forgotten. I did not come to look after you. I’m here to monitor you.”

… Mon, monitor?

Suddenly, Yasuhara stoodu up.

“Let me withdraw then.”

“Hey, young man.”

“There shouldn’t be any more problem if only I withdraw. I’m only the head of ‘Shibuya’, who later left everything to the investigators. If I withdraw with this explanation there shouldn’t be too much trouble.”

This is what we’ll say.

“I will go to Suwa to be Mori-san’s assistant. I personally also have some outstanding issues.”

After thinking deeply, Naru nodded his head.

Substitute Head Yasuhara left this mansion on the car with a staff member running errands in the city. The other psychics purposely loudly made cutting remarks that he was running away.

While we were made fun of by the people we met, we conducted the search for Fukuda-san. Despite our thorough searching, as expected, we couldn’t find a trace of Fukuda-san.

She said she wanted to go out for a stroll then she left the base used by Minami-san and his team. After that she never returned. Coincidentally there was a member of the staff cleaning the hall at that time; he didn't even see her leave the hall. She only disappeared; that's the only explanation.

Minami-san was thus in an extremely awkward situation. The other psychics derided Minami-san with, 'haven't you summoned you helpers', 'Regardless of the others, when your own assistant has disappeared, you should let us see the abilities of the Professor right?', 'Your other helpers should have arrived already, right?' and the type.

We looked at this disturbance; in the end we couldn't stand it and returned to work. We carefully completed the remaining measurements. At dusk, after we wound up the measurements, we discovered an unexpected truth.

"The structure of this house is elevated in the middle."

Lin-san said while generating the sectional diagram of the house.

We understood that the ground of the first floor of the house sloped gently towards the center; the area around the center was about 2 meters higher than the periphery.

Bou-san tilted his head.

"Why in the world would they build this type of house?"

Exactly.

"Repeatedly renovating, hence producing things like level X?"

Naru coolly shot back.

"… If that's the case?"

"I feel it wasn't intentionally done like this. This type of house is definitely constructed like this for some purpose."

"Purpose…"

John tilted his head too.

"What was this house like right at the beginning?"

Naru nodded and retrieved a printed out diagram.

“From the finish of the windows, the rooms are all built around the small structure in the middle. Extending further outwards, the rooms become gradually larger; up to this point it is clear-cut…”

Bou-san sighed a huge sigh.

“That, as expected it’s still the huge empty center portion that is suspicious. At first, there is clearly no courtyard; it’s also too strange that the ventilation is good up to the second floor. The question is where exactly is there a path to go in…”

Naru flicked at the diagram.

“If there isn’t any path to begin with?”

Ai?

“If there’s no path… if that’s the case, hey.”

“What if that piece of empty space isn’t actually a hidden room, but a sealed room?”

Ah…!

This is it, the common scenario from horror movies: the scenario where after a wall is destroyed a sealed room lies beyond it, and there’s something there. Although the empty space was too large we only considered the possibility of a hidden room; there was always the possibility that empty space was not accessible to people…

“We’ve also tried searching for a path. This is an ancient and filthy house, of course we would think that as long as we could find the path or something, we would definitely know if the people who disappeared had used it before. Dust that had been disturbed, footprint – we would depend on this type of things. – Regardless of how we search here, I don’t believe things like paths exist here. Not to say the building is added to outwards from the center; I can only believe that it was added to in order to hide something in the center.”

“… Correct.”

Bou-san finished and gazed at the ceiling.

“But, what exactly is hidden? Could it be… the execution room?”

“What it is actually like, whether something like this exists or otherwise – after we investigate the other side of the wall we will find out.”

“Are we really doing this? Knocking through the wall?”

“Of course. I’ve already obtained Ohashi-san’s understanding.”

Bou-san looked completely defeated.

Just at that time, as usual, someone knocked on the window.

4

“Madoka… Yasuhara-kun!”

Naru looked stunned.

As he looked on coolly, with a ‘heyo’, two people jumped in through the window.

“Good evening.”

“I’m here~”

–2 people who looked completely unconcerned.

“Really… what are you guys thinking of?”

Naru looked at Yasuhara.

That’s true too. He clearly left this place because it is dangerous, if he came back then isn’t that a complete waste of effort?

However, Yasuhara looked completely unperturbed.

“No, I’m here to report the things we investigated today.”

Mori-san grinned at Yasuhara.

“Yasuhara-kun, today was really too exciting.”

“That’s ~ right. It’s only because I was there.”

Yasuhara sniggered, pleased with himself.

“That is, first, when I went back to the city, I counted the number of chimneys.”

… Ai?

“I always felt it this was a little strange, but I couldn’t see too clearly from far, so after I met up with Mori-san I had her look at it again.”

Mori-san nodded. “Yes. I took the car all the way up a near-by mountain. Then from there I used a pair of rented binoculars and carefully counted it out. In the end there are 20.”

Lin-san checked the number of furnaces there were on the computer.

“When I was investigating I felt there should be 10 or 11 of them.”

Lin-san backed up Yasuhara’s words.

“There are 11.”

… There’s one extra chimney…

“After that, if we look closely at it again, the chimney at the center of the house is very strange. The shape is round, and it’s also coarser than the other chimneys.”

That was a valuable clue. There was indeed something in that empty space. At the very least, a chimney. The places that can hide a suddenly jutting out chimney are very limited. The empty space did not extend into the third floor. If the chimney extended up from the second floor, it should be visible from the third floor windows. But there was only one side of one direction which was windowless. If there was a chimney, it could only be in that direction.

Naru immediately checked the floor plan. There was an even larger empty space to the north of the huge empty space. It extended from the second floor. At once we confirmed that was the position of the chimney.

Mori-san appeared a little proud.

“The clever I properly took photos as evidence. They are currently getting developed, and you should be able to see them tomorrow. I had specially borrowed a long distance single lens reflex camera, isn’t that incredible?”

As she said that, Mori-san looked at Naru. Naru only replied with a cool gaze.

“Whatever~”

It was Bou-san who spoke instead.

“It’s incredible, very incredible. And then?”

Mori-san smiled and spoke.

“When I was doing all these, I let Yasuhara investigate in the city. He’s really good detective material.”

He~~

Yasuhara puffed out his chest.

“Whatever type of material needed, I have; because I am the genius Yasuhara.”

Smiling, he said,

“First, I tried going to the Miyama family. Furthermore, I also interviewed the near-by families, and tried my best to look for older people. Then, a few houses away, I found an eighty-two year-old old lady. She’s an energetic, still clear headed senior citizen. Thus I started asking her.”

Hu hu.

“The old lady was born around the time Mr Miyama Kaneyuki died. Yeah, there wasn’t much chance she knew Mar Kaneyuki, but I thought she might know something. Mr Kaneyuki was a capricious personality; when he was gentle he’d give others a little something, and appeared very warm. If he was in a bad mood he would hunt down other people and have his underlings surround them and beat them up; he was apparently this sort of person.”

… Hn~~

“Previously it was mentioned that Mr Kaneyuki was a mysophobic person; the old lady concurred. She said Mr Kaneyuki was extremely terrified of germs. And the family next door to the Miyama family wouldn’t careless take anything belonging to the Miyama family, not even a persimmon. Apparently they had tried before and was thus severely punished.”

“… So that’s the way it was.”

“This is about all I could get out of that old lady. Then, I let her introduce me to the old folk’s homes and community clubs in the city. Following that I tried going to those places. In the end, I heard various sayings, but the evaluation of Mr Kaneyuki was all bad.”

“.. He is a philanthropist, right?”

“That’s right; in any case the good works were done with all sorts of bad things on the sly, it was only a camouflage. That was what a lot of people thought.”

That’s unexpected…

“And then I found someone who claimed to be Mr Hiroyuki’s friend. It was an old lady; her husband was a friend of Mr Hiroyuki in his later days. According to her, Mr Hiroyuki hated his own father a lot. Apparently he practically never listened to his father’s words and he would get extremely angry if anyone were to speak of his father.”

… Hn~

“According to some of what I heard, Mr Kaneyuki apparently had very frail health since his youth.”

“Frail health?”

“Yeah. Because of his frail health, he was frequently bedridden etc when he was young. And his frequent travels abroad, while said to be only travels, should be actually trips abroad to see doctors about the aches and pains he had at that time.”

… He~

“When he was little others said he wouldn’t live long, and in reality he died at fifty. However, according to Mr Hiroyuki, it would have been better if Mr Kaneyuki had died earlier in his youth. He had apparently said this before.”

I asked.

“If Mr Kaneyuki were to die in his youth, then wouldn’t Mr Hiroyuki have not been born?”

“Exactly, that’s a very shocking statement.”

Mr Hiroyuki must have really hated his father a lot.

“Then, there’s also such an incident. Mr Kaneyuki had 2 menservants.”

… My heart pounded very hard. What incident was it? I had a bad feeling.

“And there’s more, in that old folk’s home there was a person who claimed his grandfather was a gardener here. He said this building was very strange. He said

that when he cleaned up and walked near to the main house, he would always smell a scent like that of a graveyard. Furthermore, every time he went here the maid was always a different person. That was what he said.”

“You said the maid was always a different person…?”

I felt a wave of dizziness. I felt like there was something icy cold caressing my back.

“Ooh. And then –? … Taniyama-kun?”

Yasuhara stared at my face. Chills ran down my back; it chilled me speechless. Masako stopped Bou-san, who was about to rise. She came closer to me. She gently reached out her hand, and stacked it on my shoulder.

“This person won’t do. She is unable to save you. All the people here are unable to help you – because you are already dead.”

Masako said that, and clapped my back.

“Come, come down. Don’t be afraid, and go towards the light. If you go there, you will definitely be freed.”

When Masako was saying that, the chill suddenly vanished.

“Hara-san.”

Naru asked; Masako smiled.

“It looks like the spirit here got attached to her. It’s all right. It’s already disappeared. Although I’m not sure if it has been cleansed or otherwise… you’re better already, right?”

“Yeah, thanks…”

What was that, just now…

Masako spoke.

“It definitely approached because we were chatting. Or it might be here right from the start. It looks like the spirit of the maid we were just talking about.”

When I heard those words, I immediately smelt the smell of blood. The sensation of a knife cutting through my throat. The wet warmth of blood drenching my face. The white tiles; the blood red stains.

“… It’s those two people…”

I said. Everyone was shocked.

“It’s those two people. Last night…”

They took me to the main house. I was dragged by 3 men into the main house. In a certain room in the main house they pulled me onto a surgical bed, and cut open my throat.

“It was those two people who killed me in my dream last night.”

My tears dropped down. I dreamt about the memories of the spirit. That person was murdered with that method. It was very scary. Very painful. To me it was only a dream, but to that person, that was reality. To make such terrifying memories, such painful memories, and then get killed…!

Everyone patted my back while I couldn’t help covering my face.

“… Is that the situation?”

It was Naru’s low voice.

“Are the spirits of the ones who was killed in that fashion lingering in this house?”

Save me, I don’t want to die, was what those spirits had said. Everyone all did not know that they had all died; continually wrapped in memories of terror and fear, they lingered in this house.

That’s too much; who exactly did those hideous things? … Yeah, I knew who the culprit was. Those men were the 2 menservants. If so, there should be a culprit who ordered them to do such. The culprit could only be Mr Kaneyuki.

Unforgivable. He put on the mask of a philanthropist, but could do such hideous, such cruel, and such tragic things.

Just at that time,

All the lights in the room suddenly were extinguished.

“… What?!”

With the slowly disappearing glow of the monitors, the room turned completely dark. After a sharp ‘bang’, the room was momentarily filled with

noise. Somewhere beyond this room there was an intense sound. Then, in the distance, there was someone screaming.

“Do not move!”

When Naru ordered in a sharp tone, the lights all suddenly came back on. It was like they had stopped temporarily. Simultaneously, the noise also ceased.

I didn’t even have the time to say ‘what in the world was that?’. When the lights came back on, some blood red objects jumped into our lines of sight.

“Save me”

“Save me”

“I don’t want to die”

“It hurts”

“It hurts”

“I’m terrified”

Those were the countless words written in blood on the wall.

5

We dumbly stared at the interior of the room.

Words written in blood in various sizes, styles and handwriting. Within just that moment in time, they were so numerous they had buried the wall.

“It hurts.”

“Save me.”

“I don’t want to die.”

“I’m terrified.”

“It hurts.”

“Urado.”

… “Urado”?

Quickly glancing at the words on the wall, I was stunned.

“Hey, Naru, this is…?”

Naru’s own gaze shifted to those 2 characters, then glanced around the room once more.

“Urado.”

“うらど (tl/n: hiragana for ‘Urado’). ”

Besides these, there were many other words written on the wall.

When we were in a daze, the sound of hasty footsteps sounded from somewhere within the house. These footsteps urged on Mori-san and Yasuhara.

“Naru, see you tomorrow.”

“Madoka, I’ve said before that this place is very dangerous, haven’t I?”

Accompanying Naru’s sharp voice, Bou-san waved his hand relaxedly.

“See you then, Ma’am.”

“Yeah *heart*.”

“Be careful when you go back.”

“Yes~.”

With their bright and cheerful replies, the two of them disappeared through the window.

Right on the backs of their departures, Ohashi-san opened the door.

“… Are you all fine?”

“What happened?”

Naru asked.

“Strange bloody words have appeared all around the house. It’s like they were written with blood…”

We hurried out of the room. The walls of the corridor was also filled with words: Save me save me save me save me…

Urado うらど Urado うらど…

“Exactly how many spirits are there in this house?”

Ayako shrieked.

An extremely tremendous number. There are so many…

“The name ‘Urado’ appears to have a deeper meaning than what we had imagined.”

Bou-san looked at the words on the wall.

“Somehow I don’t think it is just a simple pseudonym.”

“… Yeah.”

“If only we knew the meaning of this sentence…”

That sentence. “Heard they were ?? by Urado ?? away.”

Naru spoke softly.

“Hara-san.”

“Yes?”

“Do you have confidence in summoning a spirit here?”

Everyone’s gaze was instantly focused on Masako.

Masako’s doll like face was slightly twisted.

“… I do.”

If the spirits made these laments, and if they could possess Masako’s body…If this was so we could ask the spirits directly about the meaning of the name “Urado”. Then the things that had happened here etc can also all be uncovered.

– When my thoughts reached this point my body stiffened immediately. Spirits – from this house; spirits who were murdered… To have them possess Masako’s body. If so, then wouldn’t Masako go through an experience similar to what I had experienced?

“… No.”

“Mai?”

“Masako, you can’t do this. Don’t let the spirits possess your body.”

“What’s up? You say this so suddenly.”

“Masako might have a dream similar to mine. This type of thing won’t do.”

Naru gently sighed a breath.

“Mai, Hara-san is a professional.”

“Professional or not, you can’t let someone go through this type of experience!”

“Stop making a scene.”

Naru’s cold gaze. I returned the gaze directly.

“Can you understand the feeling of being killed by someone else? Can you imagine the sensation of the moment one dies? Naru, can you understand how scary that is? I will definitely not allow Masako perform a summoning.”

I felt Naru’s eye color darken.

As I was wrinkling up my brow, Naru gently blinked. That inexplicable color had

already disappeared from his eyes.

“… That can’t be helped. This is also a somewhat inaccurate method… Lin.”

“Yes.”

“Can they be summoned?”

“Let me try.”

“Lin-san!”

I couldn’t help speaking up in objection.

“You can’t do that type of thing. That’s so…”

That was so scary, so painful. An experience like that, I would not wish upon anybody.

“Don’t worry. I won’t let the spirit possess my body.”

“… But.”

“I’m only trying to summon the spirits. I’m not a medium myself, so I’m not able to let the spirit possess my body.”

“Is this so?”

“Yes.”

“But, Naru,”

Lin-san turned his expressionless face towards Naru.

“I’m not able to summon the spirits of those murdered here. The spirits I’m summoning now are…”

Lin-san’s voice was one that didn’t let one feel a hint of emotion.

“Assuming they’ve already died, the 3 people who have disappeared over here. Only them.”

“No matter. Try it.”

6

We chose to perform the summoning where Igarashi-sensei had performed the séance. To prepare for the summoning, Lin-san and Naru left, leaving us to set up the equipment. I set up the equipment as we had during the previous séance, while I asked Bou-san: “How do you think Lin-san will summon the spirits?”

“Summoning spirits is separated into letting the spirit possess one’s body with ‘possession’, and summoning the spirit itself with ‘Speaking to Spirits’. Masako’s is ‘possession’.”

… he.

“Lin also said he won’t let the spirit possess his body, hence it should be ‘speaking to spirits’.”

“Can this type of thing be done?”

Bou-dan shrugged.

“Normally, it can’t be done. ‘Speaking to spirits’ is also called ‘calling back spirits from the dead’; it is considered a Chinese witchcraft method. – Lin also said he is a Chinaman.”

“… Ah.”

“Although we’ve always thought Lin is an Omnyouji, if things are like this now, then the situation is slightly different. I’m afraid Lin isn’t actually an Omnyouji, but a Taoist priest practicing Chinese curses. If that’s the case then summoning spirits should be a piece of cake for him.”

… he.

“ ‘Posession’ is also known as ‘Spirit Absorbtion’; normally, compared to ‘Spirit Absorbtion’, ‘Calling back Spirits form the dead’ is more difficult to perform. The levels of the Taoist priests are completely different.”

That is to say, compared to Masako, Lin-san is even more gifted?

“… If that’s the case, even if we don’t rely on Masako, isn’t it enough if Lin-san is around?”

What the heck. That made us worry that besides Masako no one could hear the spirits speak. In the past because of that we were led in circles too.

Bou-san tilted his head.

“You can’t say that either. With this so called ‘calling back spirits from the dead’, it’s not any old spirit who can be called back. Lin has said so too right? The only spirits he can summon are those of those three people only.”

“… If, assuming the three of them are already dead, like this.”

Because there’s the possibility they are still alive.

“Anyway, whichever way doesn’t matter. To actually call a spirit back from dead, the summoned spirits’ name, date of birth and other detailed information are required. Then, at this point we only have the information about these three people. That’s why besides those three, other spirits cannot be summoned.”

Ah, so that’s the way it is.

After a while, Lin-san returned carrying a bundle. He did not change his clothes.

“Is the cleaning done?”

“It’s done.”

Before Lin-san returned, he had instructed us to clean this room beforehand. Before we set up the equipment, we scattered salt in the room, cleaned the floor, and wiped the tabletop with a fresh rag thrice.

Lin-san nodded then opened the bundle. He undid the thin yellow cloth, and retrieved a box from within. Opening the whitewood chest, there were many boxes in it. From the largest box, Lin-san took out a golden bowl then gently placed it on the table. Following that was a gold colored tachi (tl/n: long sword); two gold colored incense pots; two candlestick holders; two candles.

I somehow felt now wasn’t the time to speak; we all silently watched these on-

goings. Lin-san carefully opened a sealed whitewood box. Momentarily, from inside, overflowed a tea-leaf like scent. Lin-san placed those things into the incense pot and lit it. From the incense pot, a thin smoke rose, and the air was filled with an indescribable fragrance.

Lin-san retrieved a flat box; after raising the lid he placed it besides the bowl. From it appeared an inkwell. Lin-san retrieved a piece of paper-like paper and unfolded it, carefully tidied up the things on the table, then used the water we had prepared previously and started to slowly grind ink.

The smell of the incense filled the entire room; just as Lin-san finished grinding ink, Naru finally returned.

“Who do you want to summon?”

Lin-san asked. Naru placed his notebook on the table.

“Suzuki Naoko-san.”

Naru held what looked like Suzuki-san’s blouse in his hand. Lin-san received the blouse then carefully folded it within the bowl. Then he looked at the notebook while writing on the paper. He wrote the name, the birth date, then looked back at Naru.

“What about the date of death?”

Naru thought for a moment.

“The second day since she disappeared… approximately this time.”

Lin-san nodded, and wrote on the paper as Naru had instructed. Then he placed a completed protection seal on top of the folded blouse.

“I’m going to start.”

Lin-san placed a stick of incense in the other incense pot, lit the candles, then nodded to Naru. Naru switched off the lights in the room.

The glow from the two candles illuminated the dark interior of the room. Lin-san placed the tachi on his knees as he sat in seiza, then he gently started speaking.

An indescribable sound was produced from Lin-san’s mouth.

I could also hear the speech like sound like ‘he’. From Lin-san’s mouth came a low sound. Those sounds, in time with his breath, came forth from his mouth; that was the feeling one got from it. When he lamented it was a clear, touching sound. When he whistled it was a gentle, low pitched sound.

Lin-san slowly enunciated each sound. In this progression, the pitch changed a number of times, just like singing a song. It was high at times and low at times, strong at times and weak at times. Vibrating, reaching outwards, repeating. From his throat each sound sprung. It was an indescribable, touching sound made just of that.

I couldn’t help being enthralled by the sound. There aren’t any other such unimaginable touching sounds. I felt that I had almost attending a concert. Hence when I heard the sound of panting, I still thought that was unconsciously produced by that person – pant because of being touched by that sound.

Lin-san stopped the sound.

Once again came the sound of panting. I heard an extremely pathetic sigh.

I nervously glanced around me and realized there was a shadow on the wall directly facing Lin-san. A deep shadow cast by the weak glow of the candles. On the surface of the wall one could vaguely see the shadow of a person. This wasn’t anybody’s shadow. There wasn’t anybody in a position to cast a shadow in that location.

As I was looking around, the shadow deepened. One could tell that was a person; the shadow of a female in profile.

… Who? It couldn’t be.

Color seeped out from the shadow, gradually revealing a person. Everyone held their breaths; there wasn’t a sound to be heard in the room.

“Naru.”

Lin-san continued sitting in seiza and shouted without turning his head.

“The day’s no good. Not only can she not speak, she can’t stay that long either.”

Naru nodded. The shadow had already taken the appearance of a young girl. It

was dark, it looked a little transparent; although one could definitely tell there wasn't anything solid there, there was indeed the figure of a person, and one could tell it was the missing Suzuki-san. Suzuki-san lowered her head, faced us in profile, with her gaze fixed on her feet.

"You are Suzuki-san, right?"

Naru spoke to her. She continued staring at her feet, and nodded.

… She's already dead…

I felt extremely unhappy. As expected, Suzuki-san had already died.

"There are others besides you in this house, right?"

Suzuki-san nodded.

"Besides us and Igarashi-sensei, and the other psychics, there are other people, right?"

Her reply was still a speechless nod.

"Whether it is them or you, you are all already dead. Do you know?"

Suzuki-san suddenly lifted her head. She looked at Naru with an unfathomable expression.

Aah, Suzuki-san did not know – that she was already dead, that the others were already dead.

"Do you know why you are dead?"

She continued to stare at Naru, then shook her head.

"Then, was there someone who did something bad to you?"

Suzuki-san nodded. Her expression turned slightly twisted.

"Who is that? Is it someone else other than us?"

She nodded with an extremely pained expression.

… As expected, the spirits in this house are the criminals…

"Do you know a person called Urado?"

Suddenly, Suzuki-san's body exaggeratedly swayed backwards. Her face

twisted. Her mouth opened as though she was saying something. Not able to make a sound, she desperately lifted her hand and grasped her throat. She lifted a hand, as though to write something in the air.

“You know, right?”

Suzuki-san nodded, then shook her head. She twisted her body, moved both hands as though swimming, just like a child throwing a tantrum, using all the action in her body to say something. She stamped hard on the floor, twisted her body. Suddenly a clear high sound rose from somewhere in the room.

I unconsciously searched the surroundings for the source of the sound. Continuous intense sounds rang. Noise. “Naru, we’re at the limit.”

As though in reply to Lin-san’s gentle voice, Suzuki-san’s shadow gradually turned thinner. Suzuki-san opened her mouth wide, as though desperately shouting something, but we couldn’t hear that sound. In place of that unheard sound, was deafening high pitched noise.

Naru didn’t even have the chance to ask a question. In a flash the color disappeared, and Suzuki-san’s figure returned to being a shadow. Even as a shadow, Suzuki-san’s body still continued to twist. Then, the shadow rapidly dissolved in the darkness and vanished. Simultaneously, the noise also stopped, then there was only silence left in the room.

7

Nobody spoke before Naru switched on the lights.

When the glaring light shone down, my surroundings were filled with excited voices.

Did Lin-san really summon a spirit just now? Was Suzuki-san already dead? Are there evil spirits in this house that will kidnap people? Then are the other two people already dead too? Various voices mixed together. Suddenly Naru stared hard at the wall. Everyone's vision followed Naru's line of sight, and the excited chattering settled down.

When was it written? On the white wall, red words were written.

"ヴラド". (tl/n: Vurado in Katakana – Vlad)

Vlad? What is this…? Was it left behind by Suzuki-san's spirit?

Bou-san suddenly hammered the table once.

"The so called 'Urado', is originally 'Vlad'?"

I blinked.

Indeed, Urado and Vlad do sound very similar…

"What is this Vlad?"

John showed an expression of extreme dislike.

"The Vlad we are talking about is… the vampire Dracula."

Vampire.

"Dracula?!"

I turned to look towards Naru.

"What exactly is going on? Isn't Urado Mr Kaneyuki's pseudonym? Was Mr Kaneyuki a vampire? Are the spirits here those of people who died when their

blood was drained?”

Naru spoke, as though very annoyed.

“The story of the popularly know Dracula originates from the novel called “(Vampire) Dracula”. Do you know this?”

“… I don’t know.”

Naru sighed openly.

“ ‘Dracula’, published in 1897, is a horror novel written by Bram Stoker. A strange man by the name of Count Dracula arrives in London. He is actually a vampire – it is a story like that. This novel has been adapted into operas, movies etc, and gave birth to the domain of ‘Vampire Culture’ in literature. Do you understand up to this point?”

“… Yeah.”

“In actual fact, Count Dracula was modeled after a real person. It was a person who was really named Dracula. The Count Dracula in the novel was born in Transylvania. Transylvania has historically been the territory of Hungary, and is currently part of Romania.”

“This Transylvania you talk about, is it a real place that exists?”

I had assumed it was a fictional location…

“Of course. Dracula was a Duke from Transylvania’s neighboring area of Wallachia. His name was Vlad. He was known as Vlad III, and commonly called ‘Vlad the Impaler’.”

“Impaler?”

Naru nodded.

“At that time Europe was frequently invaded by the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Because the area of Wallachia is very near to Turkey, that area was the frontline of the battle. Furthermore, even if the king of Wallachia was overthrown, that did not stop the power struggle. Vlad was an extremely mysophobic duke, he hated being known as idle; he is well known to be ruthless, especially towards his enemies. Enemies who were captured by him were mostly executed by impalement with a spear, hence his name.”

Ge ge ge.

“This Vlad’s father was Vald II, known as ‘Vlad Dracul’. ‘Dracul’ in Romania has the meaning of devil; he was commonly known as ‘Vlad the Devil’.”

The father was a devil, the son an impaler?

“Originally this name is inaccurate. ‘Dracul’ means devil as well as ‘dragon’. In 1431, Vlad II was given the name of ‘Dracul’ by the Holy Roman Emperor. Because this was a conferred title, of course he was not called ‘Devil’. I think he should have been called ‘Dracul the Dragon Duke’ to be accurate.”

Indeed, a devil and a dragon are totally different…

“In Romanian, ‘Son of the Dragon’ and ‘Son of the Devil’ is ‘Dracula’. Hence, as a result of being Dracul’s child, Vlad was also known as ‘Dracula’. That is to say, it means ‘the Son of the Dragon Duke’. Due to Vlad’s blood drenched achievements, he was commonly known as ‘the Devil’s Spawn’, but that is actually not accurate.”

“… Hn~.”

“After Bram Stoker’s ‘Dracula’ was published, ‘Dracula’ became a synonym for vampire. Although Vlad III was notorious for his period of cruelty in Europe, he was long forgotten when Stoker’s novel was published. Bram Stoker caused him to become the center of attention once more. Then, right now, the notorious name of Dracula is reverberating through the world.”

“So that’s how it is.”

So there was also such a piece of history that I did not even know of.

“In the Wallachia area, there still remains ‘Legends of Dracula’ today. In those legends, Vlad was a savior who protected Hungary from the Germans and the Turks. Despite his actual cruelty towards his enemies, he was still the hero who defended Hungary. I don’t approve of lumping things together; taking into account the situation in Europe at that time, I think saying that isn’t wrong either.”

… Hn~.

A sarcastic smile appeared on Naru’s face.

“There’s a famous story connected to Vlad. There was a rich merchant who moved all his wealth on a carriage and passed by the capital of Wallachia. When he arrived at the capital, the rich merchant entered the castle and asked Vlad to protect his wealth. To him, Vlad said, that there wasn’t such a necessity. Then he ordered the rich merchant to leave his fortune wherever he liked then to leave. With no options, the rich merchant could only leave all his wealth in the public square before leaving.”

Eeeh. Vlad’s orders were not to be questioned.

“Then at dawn the second day, the rich merchant went to inspect his carriage, he realized not a cent of his wealth had been taken. Because Vlad was a very mysophobic duke, his own citizens were also not allowed to lie or steal or be lazy. People who did so were all impaled with no exception; hence nobody would steal a thing from the merchant.”

“… So that was the way it was. He really was a great person.”

Naru shrugged.

“Whether this was actually great or something else is interpreted differently by different people. … Anyway, he was really very similar to Vlad, Kaneyuki was.”

Bou-san tilted his head.

“Vlad was the savior of Hungary. If we put it like this, then did Kaneyuki also wanted to call himself a savior?”

Naru’s snow white fingers leaved through the materials Mori-san had brought.

“Around 1900, Kaneyuki had toured Europe. At that time the book ‘Dracula’ had long been published. I think, it is more likely that because of the meaning ‘Son of the Devil’, he called himself ‘Vlad’. – Furthermore, “

“Furthermore?”

“Mai has mentioned it before, right? There was a bathtub placed in the bathroom, and there was blood remaining in the bathtub.”

… Yeah.

“Frequently discussed together with Vlad was a person called Bathory Elizabeth. In the western style, the surname is placed behind, so she should be

Elizabeth Bathory. She is known as the ‘Blood Countess’.”

“She… is a woman?”

“That’s right. Elizabeth was a Countess who lived in 15th century Hungary. She did not have any clear connection with Vlad, but a lot of people speculate whether the two of them are related by blood.”

“Hn…”

“Elizabeth was afraid her beauty would fade. With young girls as sacrifices, she believed that if she bathed in the blood of young girls she would be able to preserve her own beauty. She killed young females, placed the blood she harvested from them into a bathtub, and then soaked her body inside. Up until one of her sacrifices escaped and exposed her crimes, this had gone on for about 10 years.”

“… with, with this…?”

Naru nodded.

“It is similar to the dream Mai had. Elizabeth and Vlad were confused; Vlad was also commonly said to have bathed in his executed enemy’s fresh blood. What if Kaneyuki had heard of these things?”

No one replied to Naru’s words. Naru smiled once more.

“Elizabeth was not formally convicted and punished; instead, the bathroom door was sealed, and all the walls and windows were sealed from the outside. In the end she died inside that prison – don’t you think there are subtle signs here?”

A sealed prison. Sealed spaces.

“However… Kaneyuki...”

Kaneyuki died of an illness, Mori-san had said before.

“Of course, I too don’t believe that Kaneyuki was closed inside that space. If that was so, such a large space wouldn’t have been necessary. However, I only think there is a clue here – a very obvious clue.”

… Indeed it was like this.

“ The pronunciation of ‘Vlad’ is even more similar to that of ‘Blad’. For some reason Kaneyuki wanted to use the name Vlad as a pseudonym, but couldn’t find a suitable kanji. Then he chose the two characters ‘Ura do’… I’m afraid this is the truth.”

… Yeah.

“Following that he was the same as the meaning of the name, and killed a lot of servants here. The spirits of the victims continue to haunt this mansion.”

Bou-san gently snapped his fingers.

“I’ve got it. That ‘Heard the were ?? by Urado. ?? away’.”

“Ai?”

When asked like this in response, Bou-san let out a bitter smile.

“It is ‘Heard they were killed by Urado’. ‘Those who came to this place have all died. Heard they were killed by Urado. Run away.’ How about that?”

A warning. The person who lived in that hidden room wanted to leave a message for the next person to arrive at this mansion; told them to run away.

I tilted my head.

“Hey, I understand that… then who did that overcoat belong to?”

“Whose was it…?”

“Because anyhow they wouldn’t let a maid live in that sort of place right? Furthermore wasn’t that overcoat a uniform of the Facility attached to the Hospital? To whom did that overcoat belong to? Was it really a maids’?”

Everyone looked at each other in dismay.

“Could it be…”

Bou-san spoke softly.

“Could it be… that fellow… also took the people from the facility…?”

Urado had his eye on the people inside the facility. He took that person here; without being discovered by the ignorant servants, he closed that person inside the hidden room. Then…

That's too much. This type of thing is really too much. Mr Kaneyuki was practically inhuman. He really was the 'Spawn of the Devil'.

I stopped short. Could it be that Mr Hiroyuki knew what his own father did in this place?

When I said that, Naru nodded.

"That's very likely. Hence he sealed this place. To prevent discovery by outsiders he buried all of it in the depths of this ever-expanding building…"

Mr Hiroyuki had also said before, "There are spirits escaping; it is to prevent them from escaping that I'm renovating."

If the question was whether Mr Hiroyuki knew of what happened here, that sentence makes one feel that the answer is definitely affirmative. I think Mr Hiroyuki must have been terrified: about his own father, about the grudges of those killed by his own father.

Naru's expression was one of deep thought.

"The ones who have disappeared are all young people…"

He said that softly with gravity.

"Why Mr Kaneyuki would do such a thing, I understand now."

Ai?

"Kaneyuki was frail and sickly; I think he must have hated his own body. Blood was thought to be the source of a human's vitality. Just like what Elizabeth believed, depending of that vitality, one's own beauty can be maintained, Kaneyuki also believed that relying on young people's vitality would keep his own health."

… Yeah.

"But in actual fact he definitely wouldn't be considered to have lived long. He must have felt regretful. Not only did he kill people to extend his own life, but in the end it still was not maintained very long."

… Indeed that was the case.

"I'm afraid the spirits of those who were killed by that fellow are not related to

the disappearances. Suzuki-san is dead. If we say the killer is the spirit living in this mansion, then that evil spirit could only be Urado."

A chill ran down my back.

"Urado is still here… still in this mansion. He is still in this house thirsting for a sacrifice."

8

When we returned to base it was 4am in the morning. Just like that the meeting continued up till the next morning; when the sun rose we started work.

“First start at the location where there is definitely a chimney.”

Naru announced. The few of us set out towards the location in question. Everyone split the burden and carried the heavy equipment.

Lin-san carried the radar as though it was a treasure. This was equipment used in the poltergeist case (tl/n: novels 1 and 2) to test for the power of suggestion. Give a certain person a hint that something associated with them – for example, a vase – would move, then seal the vase in a room. If that vase really moves, the real identity of the poltergeist is that unfathomable power of humans. To create a completely sealed room, we were unable to pull an extension or something out of the room. Hence we used radar to detect monitor the activity of the vase through the wall, and inside the room we recorded it with a wireless camera. That radar looks like it is to be used for a special purpose this time. That is, to figure out the thickness of the wall. If we had a better radar, apparently we could even find out what it is like beyond the wall.

We examined all the walls facing that empty space.

“The refractive index of this wall should be the lowest.”

Lin-san pointed at the floor plan. ‘Radar’ produces electromagnetic waves, and then receives the reflected electromagnetic waves. If the refractive index of the electromagnetic waves is low, it means that this wall is easily broken. The body of the wall is very thin, or even if it is thick, it is very weak.

We hurried to the site and used the tools borrowed from Ohashi-san to knock down the wall. More easily than imagined, we made a hole in the wall. I couldn’t see any light on the other side of the wall. To see what it was like inside, the hole was expanded; it gradually turned into a huge job, the hole measured

approximately 30 cm in diameter. I stuck the head of the infrared camera into that hole. The image taken by the camera appeared on the monitor.

Bathed in infrared light not visible to the human eye, the inside of the hole was clearly shown. Inside was a haphazard room of about 8 tatami's size. There was a huge item directly facing us.

"… That, what is it?"

Naru sank into thought.

"It looks like either an incinerator or a stove or something similar…"

Indeed, the look of the room was like that of the surroundings of the school incinerator; was what I felt recently.

"Let's go in to take a look."

Naru announced. Then we made another hole in the wall. This time, we drummed up enough energy, and made a hole large enough for a person to pass through.

Beams from our torch lights crisscrossed in the room filled with dust. The shadow of the incinerator appeared in front of us. The walls were built in the shape of a huge box; right in the middle directly facing us were two rusted metal lids; it should be the ceramic chimney continually extending towards the ceiling.

Masako, Ayako and I remained outside; the other 4 entered that room.

"Are you alright?"

We asked them. Bou-san said.

"… Aah. The floor is made of stone. It is really solid."

… No, that wasn't what I was talking about.

"It's very smelly."

Indeed, the room was filled with an intense rotting smell.

"There's a door."

Naru said softly and faced the left side of the room. Looking over we could see a slanted door illuminated by the torchlight. We could see bricks piled on the

other side of the half open door. When Naru pulled the door, the entire door fell down. On the other side of the door was a completed wall.

While the wall had a window, the other side of the window was also walled up. It was a secret room completely sealed by bricks.

Bou-san eyed a wooden boxes lined up along the wall. He knelt down, and picked up the things inside the box.

"… It's mouldy."

Just as Bou-san studied the next box…

"… Waah!"

John let out a lament-like sound.

"What's up?!"

At that time John had opened the lid of the furnace. Naru and Bou-san ran over. They shone their torches into the furnace from beside John, who was rooted to the ground over there.

"Hey, what happened?"

Naru continued to look at that place without moving.

"It's best to contact the police."

After he said that, he stood up and walked out of the room in our direction.

… Police?!

"… Hey, I said, what happened?"

I grabbed Naru, who had walked out of the hole, and asked. Naru used a very calm voice and said.

"There's a body inside."

Chapter 5: Human Devourer

1

We caught Ohashi-san in the dining room; after we reported our discovery of the body, it momentarily turned into a huge ruckus. The few psychics who had already awoken also turned embarrassed.

“… Corpse…?”

When asked this by Ohashi-san, Naru nodded.

“I think it should be one of the two who had gone missing in February. I think it’d be better to contact the police.”

“Please wait a moment.”

Ohashi-san was green in the face.

“If that’s done I’ll be very worried. I can’t decide on this by myself.”

Is this the time to say this type of thing?

“In any case, let me contact my master first. Before my master gives any instructions, would everyone please refrain from any reckless behavior.”

Saying this, Ohashi-san stumbled out of the Dining Room.

“This corpse, where was it?”

Igarashi-sensei asked.

Naru pointed at the floor plan.

After Sensei looked at it, she appeared shocked and turned to Minami-san and Professor Davies who were seated at the table. She spoke, pleased, to the two

who were still stunned.

“This is really too exciting. It’s exactly as the Professor had prophesized.”

… Ai?

“What is that?”

When Naru asked this, Igrashi-sensei spoke with a satisfied smile.

“That is, just now the Professor made a prophesy. We asked the Professor about the whereabouts of the missing people; we begged the Professor to see for them. After seeing, the Professor said the missing people were in the west.”

We turned to look towards Minami-san and Professor Davies. I don’t know when those two started to show an expression of extreme worry. In contrast, Igarashi-sensei appeared rather excited.

“This is really great. No wonder you’re a Professor.”

Naru spoke with an extremely cold voice.

“Seisei, don’t you understand?”

“Understand what?”

“If the people who disappeared in February are already dead, I think the other missing persons have almost no hope of survival.”

When he said this, Igarashi-sensei’s expression stiffened.

“… You’re saying Suzuki-san is already dead?”

We knew the answer, but somehow couldn’t say it.

“Not only Suzuki-san; I’m afraid even Atsugi-san and Fukuda-san are too.”

“But, it’s been quite some time since the people went missing in February. That person must have gotten lost.”

Naru interrupted Igarashi-sensei who had just started speaking.

“He couldn’t have gotten lost in that room.”

“… Ai?”

“That room was completely sealed from the outside. We, too, had to open a

hole in the wall to get in. Normal people using normal methods wouldn't be able to get inside. That isn't a place where someone could get lost in."

Igarashi-sensei turned green.

Suddenly, Mihashi-san stood up. He summoned one of the servants.

"You, I want to go back."

"That…"

Mihashi-san shot these few sentences to the visibly troubled servant.

"I'm saying, I want to cease investigating and go back. Tell Ohashi-kun for me that I'd like to withdraw."

Leaving the stunned servant, Mihashi-san hurried left the Dining Room. Minami-san gestured to the Professor, and the two of them rose, and left hot on Mihashi-san's heels.

The situation had turned from bad to worse. First it was Mihashi-san leaving this mansion. Then it was Imura-san and 圣-san who had just gotten up; when they heard the news of the discovery of the body they were shocked until their faces turned green, then after they heard of Mihashi-san's withdrawal, Imura-san also announced his own desire to withdraw.

Ohashi-san looked bewildered. It looked like his master had objected to contacting the police. He tried to curb sentiment that the police should be contacted while speaking to Naru, who had summoned a demolition crew to see the empty space clearly, while appearing to be at a complete lost.

Two hours later, we found out that the young lady who was a medium for 圣-san had disappeared. Although we assumed she had disappeared, we found out that 圣-san's car had also disappeared, and understood that she had ran way.

Then there was a servant who had gone to the city for errands, after which he never returned.

The rest of us who were left gathered in the Dining Room. 圣-san, Igarashi-sensei, and a woman who was Minami-san's helper.

圣-san spoke in an annoyed tone.

“My Atsugi-kun is but still missing. Even if he is really dead, I can’t go back like this.”

… That’s right.

Igarashi-sensei nodded.

“Anyhow, if we don’t hurry up and search… Poor thing…”

Saying that she covered her eyes.

Just at this time, Minami-san appeared.

“Shiraishi-kun.”

Minami-san elevated a hand to wave at Shiraishi-san. In the other hand was a bag.

“… Minami-san.”

Igarashi-sensei stood up.

“Could Minami-san be going back?”

Minami-san frowned.

“It can’t be helped.”

“But Fukuda-san from your society is still missing!”

Minami-san shifted his gaze.

“If we continue to search and are able to find her safely, I’d stay. We can’t stay in such a dangerous place, and expose ourselves to more danger. We are withdrawing.”

… How can he? Such cruelty.

Igarashi-sensei ran to Minami-san’s side.

“How can you do this.”

Igarashi-sensei grasped Minami-san’s hands, then looked at Professor Davies who was standing behind Minami-san.

“Is the Professor going back too?! Clearly the Professor’s powers are absolutely necessary to us right?!”

Neither Minami-san nor the Professor had an answer.

“I’m begging you. Please don’t go back. Please help me search for Suzuki-san.”

Igarashi-sensei grabbed the Professors’ arm.

“I’m begging you.”

The Professor, looking alarmed, shook his hand.

“I’m not.”

Whether it was Sensei or the rest of us, we all starred straight at the Professor’s face. Although it was a little raw, it was accurate Japanese.

“I – am not – the Professor.”

“What are you saying?!”

Igarashi-sensei screamed. In my heart, I thought, ‘as expected’.

“My – name is Raymond Woore, not-Davies.”

“Hey, you!”

Although Minami-san tried to stop him, words that had already been spoken could not be taken back.

The Professor – no, Woore-san wore a troubled expression.

“He, what he says, are lies. He only says things. It’s not me. Only Minami-san said, that I am Davies.”

A furious expression flashed on Minami-san’s face. Woore-san continued.

“I – want to go back. Really – want to go back.”

Igarashi-sensei let go of Woore-san’s arm, which she had grasped. Woore-san hurriedly turned and walked towards the corridor. Minami-san followed him. Nobody stopped them.

2

“… That fraud!”

Although 圣-san mumbled this, nobody bothered replying.

Naru spoke with a calm voice.

“I think it’d be better if the two of you also left this place.”

Igarashi-sensei turned her head with a tragic expression.

“Why… why do you want us to leave?”

“This place is dangerous. It’s alright to go back to Suwa city. I think it’s best to leave this building.”

Then Naru said some shocking words.

“We will also withdraw.”

“Wait… wait a moment!”

I couldn’t help shouting.

“You said withdraw… then what about the other missing people? Do you plan to ignore them and go back?”

Naru spoke in a clam voice.

“They are all already dead. There’s no hope even if we search.”

“But…”

“We’ve already searched the house. We can only conclude the missing people are in sealed rooms; and this is also a fact. However, that type of place isn’t accessible unless one opens a hole in the wall. I don’t know what method Urado used to take his sacrifices to the other side. The human body is unable to pass through walls, so I can only think that Urado manipulated space or time to do that. Do you know how much energy is needed to do this?”

… This, anyhow it is…

“That fellow isn’t loitering in this realm to wreck vengeance. Neither did he leave any love or regret in this world. That fellow merely wants to prolong his own life. Hence the need for sacrifices; that’s why he goes hunting. This can no longer be called a ghost of a deceased. You can call it a ‘demon’, ‘fiend’ or ‘monster’. It is such a monster.”

“… But.”

“Unfortunately although we know of methods to hunt spirits, we do not know a way to hunt monsters. It’s not possible to exorcise it.”

With that said, Naru looked around at everyone.

“Amongst those seated here, is there anyone who knows of how to hunt this fellow?”

Bou-san spoke.

“To be honest, I’m not able to do it. I don’t have the power to subdue this fellow who is able to make humans pass through walls.”

Ayako also agreed.

“I’m no good either. The circumstances are too poor.”

At the same time, John nodded too.

“To those who have no fear of god, I’m unable to forcibly seal him.”

Naru nodded too, then crossed his hands.

“However, that fellow has a weakness.”

… Ai

“That fellow can’t leave this house.”

“… Really?”

Bou-san clenched his fist.

“The surroundings of the house is safe, Ma’am had said so before too. During his life Urado repeatedly committed massacres here - in this house, in that room which Mai spoke of. Up till today that fellow has been restricted by this house.

Or one can call it imprisonment. So he can't hunt outside the house."

"I'm afraid it is like this."

Naru nodded.

"Therefore we can exorcise him."

"—is this so?!"

Bou-san smiled.

"Of course. Even Mai can do it too."

"… Me?"

"Just burn it. There's nothing in this world that cannot be cleansed by fire. That fellow is restricted by the house and is unable to escape; therefore it's ok to just burn the house."

"Wouldn't it remain on the ashes?"

"It shouldn't. Because that fellow isn't attached to this place, but the house itself."

… Oh, is this so?

Naru gently sighed.

"If Ohashi-san followed our advice, called the police, and dismantled the house, the missing people will be found. That isn't our job."

Bou-san grinned and said.

"Hence we will escape and leave? This isn't Naru-chan behavior."

That's true. Indeed it isn't Naru-like behavior.

"It's not running away. Our work is already complete."

Ai?

Everyone stared wide-eyed at Naru.

"I came here not to fulfill Ohashi-san's request. The request itself did not trigger my interest; even now I don't think it is anything that interesting."

"But… if that's the case then why…"

“I did not accept Ohashi-san’s request. I accepted Madoka’s request.”

“This Madoka is… Mori-san?”

“Correct. She said that Minami Psychic Research was apparently carrying a bogus Davies all around, and wished me to investigate.”

This is what you call ‘stunned speechless’.

“Our job here is already complete. There’s no reason for us to stay and expose ourselves to this danger. Even if we stayed, I don’t think we’ll encounter any interesting phenomenon. We are withdrawing.”

“We were played by you… you fellow.”

Naru looked as though it was none of his business.

“This is what they call keeping a secret in battle. Amongst us there is a fellow who can’t keep a secret.”

Saying this he looked at me.

“Yes yes, it’s just like that. Because Naru and I are different; I hate people who lie to others.”

Saying this, I turned to look at the confused Igarashi-sensei and 圣-san.

“Because of this, I’m sorry. I’ve told a lie.”

“Mai!”

Shut up. To stop me at this point is already too late.

“Our head is also a fake. I think having seen this very arrogant attitude, you already know, this person is our head.”

I clearly pointed at Naru. Naru looked displeased.

“This person is Shibuya Kazuya. I’m sorry, everyone.”

Both Igarashi-sensei and 圣-san were stunned rooted to the ground.

“Mai!”

“What?”

I don’t want to hear you complain.

Naru glared at me hatefully, then gently let out a sigh.

Good. I win.

“… Go make preparations for our withdrawal. Pack your bags.”

“Yes, boss.”

You know how incredible I am, don’t you?

3

We hurried back to our own rooms, and started packing.

I stuffed my clothes into my trunk, while I inclined my head.

“… Is this OK, to really go back?”

“Even Naru said it’s OK, so isn’t that fine?”

It looked like Ayako did not hear what I was troubled over.

“But, what of Urado’s spirit? We say they should start demolition, but what if someone goes missing during the course of the demolition?”

“Yeah~ you have a point.”

Ayako carefully folded her clothes.

“But, while it is arguably very dangerous to dismantle the house bit by bit, if that’s so… then wouldn’t it not be a problem if it were knocked down all at once with an iron ball or something similar? However one puts it, it still dismantles the house into many small portions.”

“This is… you have a point.”

Ayako started combing her hair.

“Aah, how uncomfortable. I didn’t take a bath last night, and I’m all dusty from today.”

She’s really relaxed, this fellow.

“I want to take a bath, Mai, help me delay the time a little.”

“I say…”

This way I’ll get scolded severely by Naru.

“To you, avoiding Naru is as easy as flipping your hand. Please.”

With a gentle wave, Ayako walked into the bathroom.

She really is too much, sigh…

I silently packed my bags; following that I looked back towards Masako.

“Masako, are you done?”

Masako shot me a glance, then turned away immediately.

“Masako?”

“I don’t want to be addressed so intimately by one such as you.”

… This fellow.

“When you were speaking of me you added a ‘one such as’ in front.”

Masako violently turned her head away from me, and did not give me a reply.

“Why do you hate me to this extent?”

Masako pretended not to have heard my words.

“At least tell me the reason.”

“… I?”

“That’s right. It looks like you’ve grasped Naru’s weakness, right?”

Masako appeared a little afraid.

“What type of weakness is it~? Tell me… You won’t do this, will you?”

“That’s a matter of course.”

Saying this, Masako’s expression turned a little lonely. I inclined my head.

“Because if I told you, I would really be hated.”

“… Ha?”

“Because… I know Naru’s weakness.”

Ooh. So you’ve finally admitted it.

“That’s why Naru hates me.”

Wait a moment. Why did the conversation turn out this way?

“Because Naru has a very strong sense of pride. He can’t tolerate someone

else finding out his own weakness.”

“… This fact, I’m well aware of.”

“Hence I am hated by him. If I told others of his weakness, I’ll incur a greater amount of hatred from him.”

I feel I can understand this reasoning.

Indeed it is. Even if one was not hated by Naru, he isn’t a person that one can easily get close to.

Masako stood up. She walked quickly to leave the room.

“Masako.”

If we acted unilaterally we would get scolded by Naru.

Masako opened the door, and then turned to look at me.

“Mai… as expected, I still hate you.”

I sighed.

“It’s like this. – You can’t leave the room. Didn’t he say that we cannot be alone?”

“I only want to go out to take a breath of air. The air in this room has turned very bad due to someone’s stink.”

“I understand, I understand. But, that still won’t do. It’s very dangerous.”

“I feel like being alone.”

Masako walked through the crack of the door.

“Wait! Masako!”

“I’m just in the corridor. So please don’t follow me here.”

The door closed with a gentle sound. I shrugged my shoulders. Then I smiled.

Yeah. I like Masako. Isn’t she just like a girl; so very cute?

4

When Ayako came out from the bathroom, I turned towards the door and shouted.

“Masako, come back in.”

There was no reply.

I opened the door and saw Masako standing just at the corner, looking out of the window there at the outside.

“Masako.”

When she heard my voice, Masako lifted her head at once, looked in my direction and left the window. She hurriedly used her sleeve to cover her face and turned towards the other end of the corridor.

“Wait a moment, Masako!”

… Yeah, really, this woman.

Ayako and I both hurried out of the room, chasing after Masako. After turning the corner it was a long corridor; at the corner at the end of that corridor we could see a light blue colored sleeve turning the other way.

“Masako, we’ve said before we cannot act on our own!”

We ran, chasing after that sleeve. At the corner was a flight of stairs; at the top of the stairs was a corridor that stretched in both directions. Walking up the stairs, I looked both left and right. Which direction did she go?

“Won’t it be faster if we split up and searched?”

“No. Haven’t we said we can’t go off on our own?”

Just as I replied this, light running footsteps could be heard behind me. Bou-san and John walked up to the stairs.

“Yo, how much more time do you need to pack your bags?”

“Bou-san, Masako walked off somewhere!”

John and Bou-san exchanged a glance, and sprinted up the stairs.

“… You say she walked off somewhere…”

“That is not down the stairs. Hey, John, you and Ayako search that way.”

Bou-san pointed to the right. Then he ran to the left while saying: “Mai, this way!”

Despite our repeated calling Masako’s name up and down the corridor while we searched for her, we couldn’t find a trace of Masako. I thought she must have walked towards the right; we went back to check, but John and Ayako said they did not find her. We searched more carefully down that end, but still couldn’t find Masako. We hurriedly ran back to base, and reported this incident to Naru.

“Hara-san, she…”

“We only let her out of our sights for a moment then she disappeared! Let’s hurry to find her!”

Naru threw down the wound up cable and stood up. All of us went back to the second floor to look for Masako. Despite calling Masako’s name there was no reply. Opening every door, walking from one end of the corridor to the other; despite this we couldn’t find Masako. An hour passed, then two.

Masako had vanished.

“Why did you let her go off on her own?”

Naru scolded me.

… If only I had stopped her it would be OK. I should have been more forceful. Waves of regret beat upon my heart.

At base, Naru opened the floor plan.

“If I have to say she is in a particular place, she can only be inside the void.”

He pointed at the countless blank spaces left on the floor plan.

“… What should we do?”

Bou-san asked.

“Now we can only knock down the wall to go in to take a look.”

Just as everyone was nodding in agreement, as usual, someone knocked on the window. It was still some time from dusk. It was very bright outside; we saw Yasuhara and Mori-san standing outside.

Naru succinctly explained the situation to them. We would destroy our way into each void one by one starting from the nearest, this was the order we had decided upon. Ordering everyone to carry the equipment and set out, Naru called Lin-san to him.

“Lin. Follow me.”

“Naru?”

“We are going to take a look at Hara-san’s luggage. You guys go first.”

We carried the equipment to the nearby void. Just like this morning we set up the equipment. After a while, Naru returned.

Is it OK to investigate slowly like this? How is Masako now? All the people who had vanished are all dead. Could it be that Masako, too…?

“Hey, let’s not investigate it one by one; isn’t it faster to knock them all down systematically?”

I asked. Naru replied.

“In the end it is still faster this way.”

… I understand this. But.

I helped to connect the equipment, and gradually became frustrated. While we are doing this type of thing, Masako could have been killed by them. However, despite our haste, it was a fact that the rate at which the walls were knocked down would not increase.

In the same order as we had done in this morning’s job, first was investigating the wall’s thickness, and boring a hole at the weakest point. Next was sticking the camera inside. The first void was a simple hole; there was nothing inside at

all. We carried the equipment to the next void. Getting frustrated by the constant running about, just like this we investigated the blank spaces one by one.

“Why did you come?”

Naru asked Yasuhara while carrying the equipment.

“After returning from doing interviews, there was a message left at the hotel’s reception. It said we were withdrawing. Then we thought we would come to help pack up…”

Good thing we came, Yasuhara mumbled.

“Then? Have you found out anything?”

“Ai?”

“Your interviews. Did you collect any new news?”

Yasuhara nodded.

“I went to the Old Folk’s Home once more. This time I thought there might be someone associated with the hospital or the facility. Then I really found one – a living witness.”

“The living witness you speak of is…”

Naru placed the equipment on the floor while questioning Yasuhara.

“A person who had helped in the facility when it was sealed in Meiji 40.”

“… Really?”

“Yeah. He was thirteen then; he’s ninety-six now. Although he is suffering from severe dementia, he still remembers events from the past very clearly. Then, despite my asking, he had forgotten practically everything related to the hospital and the facility. Except people frequently disappeared from the facility, he remembered only this.”

“People… disappeared?”

Yasuhara spoke while deftly untangling a cable.

“Although the facility guaranteed supplying its residents’ clothing, food and

shelter, it apparently wasn't completely free. People who left the facility were obligated to repay the sum of the things received during their stay at the facility. There were many who ran away like thieves. However, there was an incident that was famous amongst the staff. Amongst those who had run away, some were brought to the mountain villa, and then just like this, they never returned."

They were brought here…

"That old man was apparently frequently threatened by his seniors, 'if you laze of and not work you'll be brought to the mountain villa'. That's why it left such a deep impression on the old man."

"… So that's the case."

They were brought here, and then to the execution room. In order to satisfy Urado's twisted desires, their lives were forfeit as sacrifices.

… Masako. How is Masako now? She hasn't already been made into an offering, has she? Or rather is she still safe and sound now?

Please you must be safe. Somebody please protect Masako…

Smashing open the voids all around, we still couldn't find a trace of Masako. We had even investigated the X floor facing the North Block. The time on the clock had long past midnight.

We used the radar to verify the 10 walls that we thought faced the void. Whichever wall we looked at, they were all relatively thick; it was probably not possible to open a hole using simple equipment.

Looking at everyone who patiently worked repeatedly, I felt I was exhausted. I leaned against the wall, and slowly sank to the floor unmoving. With heavy labor all night, it was impossible not to feel tired. This must be the case for everyone. Despite this, once we thought of Masako, everyone worked non-stop. Furthermore everyone felt very impatient; there were continuous altercations and mistakes made all round.

I sat down and blankly stared at everyone. Ayako came to my side and bent down.

"… Tired?"

“Yeah…”

“Do you want to take a nap? I’ll accompany you.”

“But.”

“We could get some information. Whether Masako is safe or not, confirm it for us.”

I smiled. If only I could control my powers as I wished like this.

I hugged my knees, and let my head rest on my knees. I tried shutting my eyes. Only closing my eyes. My consciousness felt like drifting far away. I felt very conflicted. Clearly at a time like this. Clearly… at a time like this…

5

When I regained consciousness, I was walking down a dark corridor all by myself.

I did not have any prior memory. When did I come to this place?

Standing there tilting my head, it suddenly came to me.

This is a dream…

This must be, probably a dream, as usual.

Just as I was thinking thus, the color around me gradually disappeared; as though it had been sucked away, all light disappeared; darkness descended around me. The light and shadow of my silent surroundings were swirling. At the same time, the walls and floors and ceilings all turned transparent.

… It was as I had expected. I was, indeed, dreaming.

Within the house which had turned into a photograph negative, round snow-white spots of light swam towards me like fish, swirling around my body. I tried reaching out with my hand. When my fingertip touched the spot of light, a strange warmth radiated from it. The light which I had touched gradually floated further away from me.

Swimming forward, I saw Naru's figure in front of me.

"… Naru."

At the other end of the corridor. His snow white features and snow white hands.

"Do you know what happened to Masako?"

I asked. Naru smiled. Seeing this smile of Naru's I felt extremely relieved. A warm smile. Masako must be safe and sound now.

The white hand moved, and pointed to the right.

“… That way?”

I asked. Naru nodded. Then he smiled once more, and disappeared, as though dissolving into the darkness.

I walked towards the direction that Naru pointed to. I broke into a sprint down the shadow darkened corridor, looking for Masako.

When I was moving, my surroundings gradually regained its color. The walls turned opaque; the dark corridors became clear once more. I studied my surroundings.

… Do I want to wake up from my dream?

No, I don’t want to wake up yet. I still haven’t found Masako.

I sprinted through the corridor. In a moment a door appeared in front of me. A door at the end of the corridor. Where did I see this door before, I thought while I opened the door. Inside was a small hall. A wide, vacant hall. With stairs towards the second floor.

… This place is…

I ran straight up to the second floor. Tracing my memories, I went straight down the second floor corridor towards the depths of the house. I ran towards the door at the end of the corridor.

To open that door, I still needed to drum up a little courage. After opening the door, there was a small room covered with white towels. It was nondescript – besides my feeling this place was relatively shady. Unhesitatingly, I opened the door that led further inside. The wide bathroom appeared. – Or rather, it should be called the Execution Room. On the white tiles, were the white bathtub and white bed. Then by the wall at the end, I saw a human figure.

“Masako?!”

I ran over. The figure was wearing a kimono. She was squatting on the floor, her head pillowed on her hugged knees, unmoving. I ran to the figure’s side.

“Masako!”

I shouted. The cascading hair moved a little.

“Masako?”

Masako lifted her head.

… That’s great. She’s still alive.

“… Mai?”

“Are you OK? Are you injured?”

Masako slowly shook her head.

“No… Why… are you here…?”

“This is a dream.”

Saying that gave me a strange feeling. However, Masako still smiled.

“Is this so… I thought Mai is also dead.”

“Don’t pull this sort of jokes. Neither me nor Masako will die.”

Masako smiled tiredly.

“… Really.”

“Are you in pain? Are you alright?”

“There are many terrifying memories made in this place… I am already extremely exhausted.”

“You cannot give up. We will definitely come to rescue you.”

“… Thank you.”

Saying this, Masako smiled gently.

“I am fine. Up till just now Naru was here.”

“Naru?”

“Isn’t that strange? He stayed here keeping me company, encouraging me. It was really strange. He wore an extremely gorgeous smile.”

I smiled.

“… is it? That’s great.” Masako replied with a smile. When she smiled, tears unconsciously rolled down.

“Masako?”

“This is a dream. Perhaps this isn’t your dream, but mine?”

“No. This is my dream.”

This is such a strange conversation.

“Perhaps I am already dead, just that I don’t know myself. Do I still look like a person?”

“Yeah. Just like normal.”

“… is this so?”

Suddenly recalling something, I stuck my hand into my pocket. In my right hand was a key ring. From the metal accessory, I took out a key.

“This is… a protective charm.”

“Protective charm?”

Slanting her head, Masako accepted the key.

“This is my protective charm. It is the key to the house I used to live in.”

The house where Father and Mother lived in; the house where I was born. When Father died, Mother took it away as a protective charm. Then, in the end she left it for me.

“… For me?”

“Yeah. If you hold on to something then you can believe my words, right? And you can believe in yourself right? Masako, you are still not dead. And you are not in a dream either. Can’t you really feel the sensation of the key?”

“… Yeah.”

This is clearly my dream, but I emphasized an idiotic thing like this.

“Everyone is desperately trying to find an entry. We will definitely find it soon. We will rescue you, believe me. Wait for us.”

Masako nodded her head, and then she grasped my arm.

“This place… is very scary.”

“Yeah.”

“That man is coming.”

“Urado?”

Masako nodded. Her doll like face was slightly twisted; transparent tears rolled down.

“Besides him there is the spirit of the two men. They are coming to kill me. I desperately prayed that they would not come. But I’m already very tired…”

“You cannot give up. We’re nearly there; you must try your best.”

“I see a lot of hallucinations… a lot of people were killed… it was extremely terrifying…”

“It’s alright. We will definitely save you. That’s why, Masako, you must try your best.”

Masako nodded like a child.

“I will wait for you all. You definitely will come?”

“Yeah. Definitely. As fast as we can. Therefore…”

I did not even finish my sentence. My vision suddenly blurred, and it was black. The last thing I saw was Masako’s worried face.

6

“Mai, wake up.”

I was jolted awake.

“Are you awake? We’re about to move to the next room.”

Ayako studied my face then stood up.

“Ayako… Masako is still alive.”

Ayako snapped her head back to look at me.

“… Mai?”

“She’s still alive. Just in the Execution Room. She told me, very scared, and very sad. But, she looks as though she still has energy.”

Tears streamed uncontrolledly down.

Ayako studied my face, unmoving. I knew that everyone’s gazes were centered on me.

“… Really?”

“Yeah.”

Everyone wore worried expressions in response to my words. I was the same. The more, ‘that’s great’ and happiness, the less I could believe in my own abilities.

Wearing a complicated expression, Naru faced everyone and said.

“Let’s move.”

In the next room, Lin-san identified the point of opening.

“This place in the wall is thinner than the rest.”

Everyone boisterously gathered around the monitor; we could see that right in

the middle of the snow white wall, there was a thin, gigantic, square shaped shadow. The image produced by the radar shows the areas where the electromagnetic waves are reflected strongly as white. That thin shadow meant that the wall at that location was comparatively thinner.

Bou-san and Yasuhara rolled up their sleeves and approached the wall, lifting a grub hoe and a hammer. Relatively easily, they made a hole in the wall. Bou-san shone the torchlight inwards and looked inside.

All of us pooled our strength to expand the hole.

The other side of the wall was more than a meter lower than this side. Inside, there was a stone crafted staircase and a veranda. Then there was a double paneled door that faced us straight ahead. One look identified it as the front porch.

Above this was a building; there was maybe one or two or three floors above it. Thinking this, I felt it was extremely strange. Another front porch hidden in the depths of the house.

Bou-san and Yasuhara jumped in and sprinted to the door. They used the tools they held to pry open the door. Rather than destroying the lock, they destroyed the door itself. The door opened inwards.

Entering the doorway was the front hall. On the dust covered carpets, the furniture was still placed properly there. Everything was covered with dust like snowdrifts after a storm. I somehow felt like I was lost in a strange world. The corridor extended straight inwards from the hall. On the right there was a staircase towards the second floor. Using the torch to illuminate it, we could see the second floor landing was blocked off. I'm afraid it was the floor of the first floor of the north block.

"Mai, is this the hall that you saw in your dreams?"

Bou-san asked.

"It isn't. It isn't like this."

Naru used his torch to illuminate the surroundings while he said.

"Is it possible that… this is the main house which Kaneyuki lived in?"

“It’s possible.”

“Then, somewhere in here there should be a room with a furnace. On the right hand side of the furnace there is a closet!”

I said while hurriedly passing through the corridor to open the doors on both sides.

At the end of the corridor we found that room.

“… This room!”

The room inside had practically the same layout as the one I had seen in my dream. A furnace. A low table in front of the furnace. Closets to the right of the furnace.

… This room really exists.

Naru opened the door of the closet. That was different from the dream: a curtain hung inside. We opened the curtain. There was still a door inside. Naru opened that door. On the other side of the door was a narrow corridor.

“Found it!”

Ayako clapped her hands once.

“Incredible, Mai!”

Naru spoke expressionlessly.

“Going in.”

The corridor ceased in only 10 meters or so. Opening the door at the end, a 3 tatami sized room appeared in front of our eyes. Opening the other door inside that room, a dark spaced appeared.

“Ai~?”

“Aah?!”

An enormous hole. The torch’s light shone all around; we couldn’t help getting shocked.

Dark, cut off from the emptiness. (tl/n: I know this doesn’t make sense. Somebody please proof this from Japanese.) A huge yet vacant space, about the

size of a gymnasium. Although the floor of the upper level was repeatedly crisscrossed with uneven blocks jutting in and out, the lowest point was only as high as my crouching body, the highest point was as high as Lin-san's fingertips with his hands raised.

Then in this space, there were the skeletal figures of wilted trees lined up.

"This is a maze…"

The trees were clearly lined up in a maze-like shape. When the trees were covered with leaves, the exit at the other side would definitely not be visible. Since the trees have now all withered and died, one could see the other side through the naked white branches.

It was very easy to walk through the maze. That was because the branches could be broken with a hard twist. While we shone the torch light at our surroundings, we broke off branches; we followed the wall inwards, where we found a door.

After comparing the compass and the floorplan, Lin-san spoke.

"Naru, we have approximately reached the edge of the enormous void."

Was what he said.

The X-floor in the North block. The floor that protruded out in the middle. Then there was that enormous void that extended even into the second floor. We understood that all those were connected together.

7

Opening the door, there was a hall inside. There was a flight of stairs extending upwards across the scene of the wide room. There were three doors connected to the hall. There was neither furniture nor carpet nor anything else inside.

While looking around the hall, once more, I grasped my torch and started running.

… It's exactly here, I'm sure it isn't wrong.

"—Masako!"

"Mai!"

Although I heard their restraining voices, my legs did not stop. I ran up to the second floor, rapidly passing through the corridor towards the room at the end. I opened the door.

"Masako!"

Passing through the small room, I opened the door. The tiles vaguely reflected the torch light darkly. I rushed straight into the bathroom. The floor was slippery; I stumbled towards the inside wall. I slipped and fell towards the bed; I grasped the bed's side. I could feel the ice-cold sensation of wet tile with my hand. I shone the torch towards the wall.

"Masako!!"

"… Mai."

I heard Masako's weak voice. I shone the torch towards the source of the voice; I saw Masako's figure crouching by the wall.

Aah, that's great. That's really great…!

I ran to Masako's side and squatted down.

"That's great. Are you alright?"

Masako nodded.

“You came really fast.”

Saying that, Masako frowned.

“Are you injured?”

“… Ai?”

Masako reached out and touched my face. A glance showed her fingertip to be dark black.

… What?

I couldn’t help wiping my own face. I realized my own hand was also completely blood red. It was like a red colored tar-like fluid.

… Why?

Just as that thought passed through my head, I recalled the incident in which I had grasped that bed just now. I had touched it. I felt the sensation of the moist tile…

I couldn’t help shining the torch into the surrounding darkness. The torchlight illuminated the bed behind me.

The white bed reflected light as though it was drenched. It was a reddish black liquid.

Masako cried out. The bed was a sea of blood. The red liquid flowed in a river, dripped on the floor, and formed a huge puddle of blood.

… Just now I slipped and fell.

Thinking carefully about it, for this second floor room that had been sealed for a very long time, it was clearly impossible for there to be water and the like.

I looked at the sole of my shoe. It, too, was stained bright red by some blood red liquid.

With trembling hands I shone the torch onto the bed. The bed was stained with blood splatter which oozed puddle after puddle of viscous blood.

… Why? Why is there so much blood?

In this tightly sealed building, in this room where people couldn't possibly enter, why?

There was only one answer.

Just when I was about to scream, suddenly there came a weak tapping sound from somewhere. On alert, I shone the torch towards the source of the sound.

The source of the sound was a bathtub. The white bathtub was inscribed with numerous red squares written with blood. I could see the blood-red surface of the liquid filling the bathtub.

I suddenly felt a wave of nausea. My body trembled.

… That much… blood.

Masako's hand grasped my arm tightly. My hand held Masako's tightly.

'Tap', came another sound. The surface of the liquid shimmered. Creating a wave of ripples, the surface of the water started vibrating. The blood-red fluid sparkled. A human head appeared above the fluid. That person slowly floated up. The forehead appeared; the eyes looked all around; that pair of eyes paused on us. Then he slowly stood up.

The upper body of the man who had been soaking quietly in the blood appeared. He was a gaunt man. He held on to the edge of the bathtub and stood up. He looked at us, a cold smile appearing on his lips. His face, shoulders and hands were all stained completely red. Drenched completely in extremely sticky, viscous, blood, he looked like a bronze stature painted with a frightening color.

"… Urado!"

I screamed. The man smiled. Even his mouth was filled with blood; it looked like he had just vomited blood. I released Masako's arm and put both my hands together, folding up my fingers to form the Acalanatha seal.

That blood is… that is…

I chanted while my mind was in a complete haze. The missing people. Those people's…

I released my fingers to gather up the sword seal. My fingers slashed through the air. Horizontally, then towards the ground.

“Rin (臨), Pyō (兵), Tō (闘), Sha (者), Kai (皆), Jin (陣), Retsu (列), Zai (在), Zen (前).”

The man who was getting up suddenly fell back. With an intense sound, bubbles rose, shattering the surface of the water; the spray reached even where I was.

I pulled up Masako’s hand. I stood up, and shot a glance at the bathtub. Just as I was about to sprint away from this place, suddenly somebody grabbed my arm from behind.

The well-muscled male hand grabbed both my hands from behind. It clearly felt like a wall behind me. Clearly there couldn’t be anyone behind me. The torch fell to the floor, its light extinguished. In the instant when the light disappeared, I saw the living, male hands which grabbed both Masako and I. Two hands extending from the wall.

As though to break my arm, I was grabbed forcefully. I was in so much pain I couldn’t make a sound. Even despite twisting my body, my hands could only feel the ice cold sensation of the tiles.

Once more, a ‘tap’ sounded. Even if I opened my eyes wide, there was only darkness in front of me. From somewhere came the splashing sound of a person rising from the bathtub. The intense sound of blood splatter.

That was Urado. The Bloody Vlad. – “Son of the Devil”.

The force that grabbed my hands increased, so much so I couldn’t catch my breath. Thud, came the sound of a foot stepping on the tiles. Thud, thud. It gradually approached me in the darkness.

Just at that time, the bathroom was filled with light.

The strong beam of light from the torch shone across the room. In front of me, I saw Urado, completely blood red.

“No!!”

Don’t come closer! Don’t come closer!!

“Save me!!”

Bou-san picked up his gold colored holy prop. Even faster than this, Lin-san

whistled once.

At the same time as the high, sharp sound, something white flew over. Snow white, a something that gave off a weak glow. It carved a sharp arc and hurtled towards Urado, slamming into him. Just at that moment, Urado's expression twisted, then suddenly vanished. Following that, the sensation of the hands grabbing my arms also disappeared.

I pulled Masako and dashed out, towards the presence of the light. Running towards where everyone was.

8

Everyone welcomed us, haphazardly patting my back and head. Although it hurt a little, I felt a bit happy.

Even if I turned back to look at that room, I could see a wall had been stained with blood.

“Let’s go. Urado has yet to be vanquished. I have only scared him a little.”

With Lin-san’s urging, we ran to the corridor. We ran down the stairs, through the hall. We sprinted through the maze. Walking out of X floor, we stumbled outside. Ignoring the equipment placed around the hole, we hurriedly walked out of the house. When we burst through the nearest window, I found it strange as to why all that running did not cause cardioplegia.

The night sky was clear and bright. Just like that, we fell sitting on the overgrown lawn, and finally let out a breath.

“Really… don’t… go off on your own.”

Bou-san said disjointedly.

“Yeah… sorry.”

“But, thanks to you, you could say we found them.”

Ai?

“It’s all in the second floor, everyone.”

I sat up and looked at Bou-san. Bou-san pointed to the sky while lying down.

“The missing people. … My throat hurts.”

Although the way he expressed it was very strange, I could understand his meaning. As expected, that blood belonged to those people.

“They were all piled in the room next to the bathroom. Just like objects.”

… Too much.

“The room in front of that was fitted with shelves on all walls, the shelves were piled with bone. It’s a good thing you didn’t see it. It was a number that is nauseating on sight.”

“… Why did he do that with the bones…?”

“Who knows? But those were bones that had already been cremated. Most likely they were collected after being burnt in the furnace. But they were carefully arranged. It’s almost like they were put on display.”

… Was that done by Urado? What in the world was that man thinking to line the skeletons up? What reason was it for? It was completely beyond my imagination.

“Mr Hiroyuki hid that place – because that wasn’t a quantity that a person could have gotten rid of. And to ask a single person to do it, it’d have been impossible for anyone.”

The people who were killed. Numerous… sacrificial victims.

“Poor things…”

“… Aah.”

Just like that we sank into silence.

After a while, suddenly somebody nudged my back.

“Mai…”

Masako spoke to me, then she sat beside me. Although she looked completely exhausted, a smile still hovered on her face.

“Thank you.”

Aiyah, you don’t have to thank me. I had just thought of replying with that, when Bou-san spoke severely.

“Masako, you cannot thank her. If you do you’ll spoil her, and make her more impetuous.”

“What~”

“That’s the truth. Despite telling you not to go off on your own, you ran off at the drop of a hat. We would have found Masako eventually, you fellow. You did not learn that lesson at all.”

Wu… The way you put it sound extremely reasonable.

“That too.”

Hey hey, even Masako is agreeing.

“Then, the thanks just now should be considered last night’s portion.”

“Last night’s portion?”

What was that?

Masako laughed.

“Didn’t you come then?”

… Hey, but that was in my dreams.

Masako smiled graciously and opened her right fist. On her palm was a key.

“Ai~~!!”

I hurriedly searched my pocket. After identifying my keyring, I realized that the key that was my protective charm was indeed missing.

“… Liar.”

Bou-san moved closer.

“What’s up?”

After Masako related the incident, everyone stared, wide-eyed.

“This fellow really surprises people… Young lady, aren’t you rather outstanding.”

… Ha~

“You see the past and the future; this time, was it an out of body experience?”

“Out of body experience?!”

Me… me?

“I can only think so. No, your skills are only increasing.”

… It’s not a skill, right? It shouldn’t be.

Bou-san teased me non-stop. Despite being praised like that I couldn’t even be pleased.

Naru spoke with a harsh voice while he stood up.

“In Mai’s situation, if she can do half of that as she wished she’d be more useful than a cat.”

With the word ‘cat’, Masako laughed out loud.

You fellow~~

If I ignored her she would continue laughing like that.

“Masako, I say that is…”

“Sor, sorry, for laughing at you.”

Any~way I’m only at the level of cats and dogs. Hn.

… But, an out of body experience – that’s having only the spirit leave the body and come out.

Perhaps I really am incredible?

9

As dawn approached, we stood up one by one, and walked towards the house. Maintaining silence, we circumvented the veranda. Because the door was locked, we knocked on the door to have the people inside open the door for us.

After opening the door, Ohashi-san stared at us, wide-eyed.

“Everyone… what happened?”

Ohashi-san mumbled to himself, then sighed a heavy breathe.

“… that’s great, sometime in the night everyone disappeared, for a moment I thought all of you had vanished…”

Saying that, Ohashi-san’s gaze locked on Yasuhara and Mori-san’s body, and was shocked.

“Shibuya-san, when did you… that… this is…”

Ah, right, does Ohasahi-san still believe in that big lie?

Naru slapped Yasuhara’s shoulder and whispered to him. Then Yasuhara nodded and stood up straight.

“We have already found the rest of the missing people.”

“Really? Where…?”

“In the depths of the mansion. Unfortunately, they are all already dead.”

Hearing Yasuhara’s words, Ohashi-san looked towards the ceiling.

“I request to contact the police.”

“… Yes.”

Ohashi-san nodded, then said to Yasuhara.

“How is it going on the side of the exorcisms?”

Yasuhara spoke heavily.

“Exorcism is impossible.”

“… Then.”

“Subsequently I will submit a report to you. Either you seal the house tightly, and follow the last will and let it rot away slowly, or we suggest using fire to cleanse it.”

“… Undestood.”

Ohashi-san bowed deeply.

At dawn, we started packing the equipment.

“… Right, Lin-san.”

I tried asking while I packed the tapes *etc.*

“When you performed the summoning, didn’t you make that indescribable sound? What was that?”

Lin-san shot me a glance, and spoke emotionlessly.

“That is called whistling.”

Although his tone held no warmth, he did answer my question – this was a huge improvement already.

“He~ It was a very touching sound.”

Lin-san did not reply; a small smile appeared on his face.

“Right, Lin-san.”

Bou-san asked while moving equipment from the stand. That, because each and every time he was forced to help pack, Bou-san has become quite well versed with packing things up, is something that is laughable.

“What was that at the end?”

Bou-san asked; Lin-san inclined his head expressionlessly.

“At the end…?”

“When we were rescuing Mai and Masako, didn’t you throw something out or

what?”

Mumbling, Ah, Lin-san rreplied.

“That was my shikigami.”

Shikigami?

“What is this ‘shikigami’?”

Lin-san did not answer. I pulled Bou-san’s clothing.

“Amongst the Chinese Taoist Priests, there are some who can dictate the actions of captured monsters or spirits. They are also called servant ghosts or employed ghosts. Spirits that are used are called shikigami. – Is it accurate to put it like this?”

Bou-san looked at Lin-san. A small smile appeared on Lin-san’s lips.

“… That should be correct.”

He~~

“Lin-san is really incredible.”

I couldn’t help saying that to myself; Lin-san gently lowered his head.

Really? Can one control spirits? I feel that is very cool.

Just as I was thinking about such things and feeling touched all by myself, someone gently patted my back.

Turning back, Mori-san was grinning.

“Thank you for your work. You’re very incredible.”

Me… Incredible. That really gave me a shock.

“Howe can it be, I’m not the least –”

“You are, you are.”

Bou-san stuck his head in.

“Ma’am, you cannot praise this fellow. If she gets proud she’ll stampede out of control.”

“Can you don’t use the term ‘stampede’?”

“That’s the fact. You almost gave me a bit of conscience.”

Staring at me once, Bou-san and Mori-san laughed.

“This fellow, if she had superpowers like Atlas, if she were to see an old lady struggling to tear some pancakes, she’d help the old lady out of compassion; if she were to exert herself, the world would be torn into two sides – she’s this type of person.”

… What type of comparison is that, hey.

Yasuhara and Ayako also laughed simultaneously.

… Yeah.

Just as I was thinking of grumbling, ‘crack’ came a sharp sound from somewhere. That was the sound of something falling out of Naru’s shirt pocket to the ground.

“… This.”

Masako hurriedly picked up that item. It was a comb made from poplar.

Naru appeared clearly awkward. Aiyah, for this fellow to be like this is really rare.

“This is my comb.”

Ho~w!?

“I clearly put it in my handbag, inside the room.”

Naru desperately plotted to leave this topic.

I couldn’t help saying it out.

“Why would you carry this type of thing?”

Despite calling Naru, whose back was towards me while he started arranging the equipment, he did not make a sound.

“The relationship is really close~”

Said the eternally happy Bou-san.

“So you were this worried~”

Was what Mori-san, with a regretful expression, said.

“It’s a really touching story~”

Why was Yasuhara nodding?

I also wanted to say a few words to Naru, who was determinedly pretending not to know, but…

… Somehow I felt a little hurt. Is~ it, is~ it? That’s really great, Masako.

Aah, this is the emptiness of life.

After that we toured Suwa.

10 days after we had returned to Tokyo, the newspapers reported news of a small fire on a mountain in the region of Suwa district. Apparently it was caused by fire starters left by vagrants. The nearby forest and a holiday home were completely destroyed. Coincidentally there was a shower which extinguished the fire.

Epilogue

Tokyo, Shibuya, Dougenzaka.

Member of ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’, Taniyama Mai, is currently in a bad mood.

That’s right, I am currently feeling very powerless.

“Aah, I hate that comb.”

I clenched my fist, saying that. Taka spoke, highly surprised.

“Thinking negatively, shouldn’t you hate Masako-san?”

“To hate Masako is also unbearable. If that comb did not exist then I wouldn’t need to be depressed over here.”

“I feel that hating a comb would be even more unbearable.”

Chiaki-senpai also agreed.

“Exactly.”

That’s it. Ignore me. Right now my feelings are in the midst of fiercely hating that comb.

Chiaki-senpai gently caressed my head.

“Forget it, don’t be so pessimistic. Perhaps there isn’t any greater meaning in this.”

“That there isn’t any greater meaning, Naru has already said so.”

“… Perhaps it is like this.”

Chiaki-senpai actually completely misunderstood me.

When I was drowning in sorrow, somebody opened the office door.

“Good day everyone.”

Mori-san appeared.

“Ah, welcome.”

“Where are Lin and Naru?”

“They have gone out for lunch.”

“Ah la.”

Mori-san showed an expression of regret.

“Do you have any problems?”

I asked. Mori-san shook her head.

“It’s not that. I’m going back today, so I simply thought of eating a meal with them.”

“You’re going back? Where are you going back to?”

Taka asked, while serving up red tea. Mori-san smiled mischievously.

“That’s a secret.”

Ah~ this person is also a character associated with ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’. They are really completely secretive.

Aiyoh, mentioning ‘secretive’, I recalled that.

I seriously looked at Mori-san’s face.

“What’s up?”

This person knows a lot of things that we do not. Furthermore, Lin-san and Naru aren’t around now. In other words, this is an opportunity.

“That is… Mori-san.”

“Wh~at?”

“What kind of people are Naru’s parents?”

Lin-san had said before that Naru’s parents are both in good health. To tell the truth, I was shocked by that. No, however one puts it, Naru is also human; it’s a matter of course that he has parents.

Mori-san inclined her head.

“What kind of people, you ask… they’re normal people.”

“Their son doesn’t go to school, but works here; wouldn’t normal people stop this?”

With an ‘aah’, Mori-san flashed a smile.

“Naru’s father is a researcher in supernatural phenomenon.”

Ee. Are both father and son supernaturalists?

“Then, is he a Professor or something?”

“Yeah. Right. –?”

Mori-san stared at my face.

“Could it be, you’re investigating his background?”

“Ah, no… it’s not like that.”

There’s just a little.

Mori-san gazed at me unblinkingly. Then, under her breathe came, ‘as expected.’

“Although Naru doesn’t talk about himself if you don’t ask him, he isn’t that type of secretive person. There’s just a bit of work that needs to be done now.”

“… Work?”

Mori-san nodded with gravity.

“You must keep this a secret for me.”

“Yes.”

Of course, my lips are sealed.

I couldn’t help leaning forward.

“—In truth, Naru and Lin-san are eloping.”

“… You, what are you saying?!”

Mori-san sighed with a serious expression.

“Those around them objected to their immoral love, thus, hand in hand, the two of them… if they were caught by their parents, what kind of punishment

awaits them…?”

“That, that…”

“They would definitely be cruelly torn apart…”

“Hey hey?”

Mori-san lifted her head.

“Is that… true?”

I asked, stammering.

“Ai? Did you believe a little of that?”

Was the surprised reply.

… I wish everyone wouldn’t bully this depressed me.

Taka laughed out loud.

“Ex, exactly. That’s impossible. Because, the boss, towards Hara-san…”

Saying that, Taka hurriedly looked at me, then covered her mouth.

What towards Hara-san – was not necessary to say out loud.

Mori-san was completely flustered.

“Is it like this?”

Taka leaned forward.

“Isn’t it so? Because, wasn’t boss carrying Hara-san’s comb?”

When Taka finished, Mori-san’s eyes widened momentarily, after which she started giggling.

“It’s not. A misunderstanding. That is a complete misunderstanding.”

“But… didn’t you say, ‘so you were this worried’?”

Didn’t she say that?

Mori-san’s eyes widened.

“What I said wasn’t of that meaning. Naru also gets concerned about his companions. Although he isn’t an expressive child, he isn’t a robot.”

“… Is, is that so?”

That under Naru’s cold-blooded, iron-faced exterior, there lies a warm heart – is that the meaning?

Mori-san looked at the ceiling with an uncertain expression.

“… I think… it’s like this… would it be otherwise?”

This won’t do.

Taka and Chiaki-senpai both hugged their heads in deep thought.

Yeah, but, I was a little relieved. At least I felt my mood get much better.

Smile and you’ll be happy; broadmindness brings health; work hard and you’ll be rewarded; haste makes waste; easy come, easy go; people before me have frequently said these. Yeah.

More importantly, it’s probably still too early to give up right now.

Mori-san stood up.

“Since Naru and Lin are not around, we might as well close the office to go for lunch. Ladies, my treat.”

Oh, still that ‘nico nico’ smile. That is such a magical smile.

“What do you guys want to eat?”

“If you want to treat me, anything will do.”

“Ah la, well said.”

With a peng, Mori-san patted my shoulder.

We walked proudly out of the office.

Outside, the Sakura was in full bloom.